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# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build



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## UNQUESTIONED FAITH

Religion is scarcely distinguishable from childhood delusions like the "imaginary friend" and the bogeyman under the bed. Unfortunately the God delusion possesses adults. A delusion is something that people believe in despite a total lack of evidence and such delusions ask for trouble because disagreements between incompatible beliefs cannot be settled by reasonable argument.

Most religious people are very decent and nice But in a sense they have brought religious extremism on the world by teaching people the virtues of unquestioned faith.

**Richard Dawkins**  
(The God Delusion)

Articles can be reproduce with due acknowledgment.

## R. S. S. (RATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY): THE URGENT NEED OF THE HOUR

R.S.S? The urgent need of the hour?? Yes; and I say this with all the emphasis at my command!

But, please beware Readers, by R.S.S. I do NOT mean Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which perhaps is an emblem of the very antithesis of what I am trying to drive the readers at! By R.S.S. I mean Rational Secular Society, “so dear and near to me owing to the great merits of my R.S.S”.

I must now explain why I call this the urgent need of the hour.

Rational: Our society is by and large in the grip of faithists, none of whose countless theorems have any tenable proof! The Buwas, Maharajas, Swamis miracle – monsters and many others of their ilk – women not excluded – are bewitching men and women, even political leaders too, by their so called supernatural acts and verbose discusses which are in fact anything sans truth, which Mahatma Gandhi called God albeit influenced by invulnerable positing of Gora, a great atheist, rationalist and humanist of Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh. The credible masses do not pause even a while to think and question these faithists for fear of being ostracized as unbelievers! They also obstruct such persons as try to expose the faithists’ manoeuvres. The result is, blind faith grows by leaps and bounds; and Reasons, Reasonists and Reasonism are attempted to be misnamed as BAD!, little realising that these are the only saviours of the society, disabusing it of fake concepts, which eventually subject it to serfdom of unhealthy ideas. Rationalism or Reasonism as I choose calling it, the only seeker of lasting truth is therefore a must for every society, be it Hindu, Muslim, Christian or any other. It is pleasing to note that Reasonism is growing, at a snail speed, though! And this is despite the fact that it has no money lords behind it as faithists have!

Secular: This word which finds a place in our constitution also has two meanings in the dictionary. One is ‘Non-religious’ and the other is ‘ephemeral’, mundane and the like.

Religious differences are man-made, including numberless caste and creed variations. Due to this man is alienated to man not to speak of numberless internecine strife causing thousands of deaths! No God of any religion has ever put a halt to this heinous holocaust! As far as the other meaning of secular is concerned viz, ephemeral, mundane, it is of utmost importance that both the rulers and the subjects must heed to secular in all their acts, with a view of doing away with inter-caste, inter-religious conflicts which are unfortunately order of the day, even today, as it was in the past too. This good principle should start with the rulers first. They should not hanker after the other worldly interests, either of themselves or of the subjects. Non - observance of this is a deathblow to civilisation which is seen in everyday occurrences today. Secular has no other alternative.

Society: It is a matter of great grief that even after sixty years of freedom, we do not yet deserve the nomenclature ‘Society’ at all. The sense of brotherhood and sisterhood is still conspicuous by its total absence. What Dr. Ambedkar said years back still holds good. He had said something like this: “We are not a society. We are incongruent elements!” I think being a society is possible only when each member of it or at least a majority hugs reasonism, secularism and throws the shackles of faithism outright.

It is however gratifying to note that these good ideals are becoming acceptable to society by and by. To accelerate this pace should be the duty of every citizen. I do not know whether I will see this golden day in my lifetime of which 84 years have already passed out. If I do, my bliss will know no bounds and I will take my last breath with peace and tranquillity.

My hearty good wishes to all the R.S.S. members of my cult explained above. MAY REASON TRIUMPH!

Y J Mahabal

## SAGA OF AN ENLIGHTENED SURGEON

When complete healthcare system in India is deteriorating rapidly and is subjected to whips and fancies of a few individuals, politicians and their cronies and policy makers it has become extremely difficult for a medical practitioner to sustain myriad pressures and turbulences. Dr. R R Tongaonkar is an exemplary person who not only sustained all the problems while practicing the surgery in a remotest corner of Maharashtra for last 38 years but also lead a satisfactory life in the process. As he rightly mentions, Dondaicha is neither village nor a township but which has all the disadvantages and drawbacks of both urban and rural conditions. Dr. R R Tongaonkar, a rank holder in MS, opted willingly for severe life by deciding to start practicing in a village where even minimum infra-structural facilities like transport, communication, electricity, running water, sanitation etc were lacking. In addition to these problems there is a lack of awareness of health and medical care in rural region. Poverty distances the sick from physicians. The demands of the rural life are very different to the demands of city living. He might have felt to obey his father's wish and continue his father's legacy of social service and help poor as far as possible.

Tongaonkar's father was a typical Gandhian who believed in simplicity, hard working and disciplined lifestyle. He was a visionary and a dreamer. He had cherished a dream that his son will one day become a doctor in his village and serve poor. He himself missed the opportunity to practice 'Ayurveda' since freedom struggle was on his priority list. Tongaonkar's mother, a schoolteacher was also a good motivator. His marriage with Asha, who is a medical graduate, assisted him throughout his professional career. In fact he attributes his success in life to his wife and his family members. She managed all the administrative routine jobs of the rural hospital leaving him to concentrate in the surgery. In fact Doctor stresses that if one wants to practice in a village atmosphere, it is mandatory that both husband and wife should be medical professionals for obvious reasons.

After going through the internship at Mission Hospital, Miraj, under the guidance of renowned and dedicated surgeons, he took decision to settle down in Dondaicha. He had to start ab-initio, right from finding a place for the hospital, arranging the basic surgical facilities, setting operation theatre, and other mundane facilities. He started OPD to establish himself as doctor to treat any patient and perform surgeries even if they are outside the field of his expertise. He was forced to gain expertise in almost all the branches of medicine since he has to survive in the rural conditions. He used common sense approach in most of the circumstances and found solutions to problems, which were peculiar in nature. Dr. Tongaonkar narrates his experiences of initial days of his running the hospital, days of practicing, he used to visit the patients on bicycle, how he used to be impatient and under tension, how he used to take night calls, the episode about conducting the surgery in the remotest village without any light. If one can go thoroughly into the details of chapters like improving hospitals in rural areas, surgical skills, finance and income tax planning, doctor - patient relationship, academic qualifications etc, there are many useful tips and suggestions which can be implemented without any difficulty. The gist of his life long experience is made available to a reader to follow, learn and practice. We have a tendency to believe that as we grow older there is nothing to learn. This is not so. Dr. Tongaonkar took troubles to improve his surgical skills till his retirement. He continuously updated his knowledge and skills in order to keep up with the rapid pace of changes in the medical technology.

As one reader a comment, the autobiography reads like an interesting novel and one would like to finish in one sitting. The book is all about making a person, who has zeal to work hard, face challenges, be methodical, be humane, and be rational, under all conditions and circumstances. He practices humanistic approach in his professional, social and family life. 'Making of Rural Surgeon' is a story of an extremely talented and humane person who wants to share his experiences with the

readers. He does not claim that whatever he did need not be taken as a model and follow ditto.

One will certainly appreciate the way in which he practiced his profession throughout his career. He never liked the recent trend of medical practice as profit making business venture rather than as a noble profession. In spite of changed circumstances he avoided all unethical practices like unnecessary investigations and surgeries, cut practice, prescription of costly and unnecessary medicine, accepting gifts from pharmaceutical companies, giving and receiving commissions in return for referral and diagnostics, etc. It requires a great courage and will power to practice ethically specially in the prevailing medical field. Ethics are our character makers. Qualities such as consideration, empathy, discipline, integrity, patience, simplicity, detachment, appreciation, honesty, compassion are in fact imbibed in Doctor's life. He practiced ethics as strict moral code.

He had a number of contributions made towards his medical profession. He took initiative to form Association of Rural surgeons of India and convince the public at large and government about their role in rural development. He also took the issue of Un-Banked Blood Transfusion (UDBT). Because of some slippage while drafting the blood bank regulations about blood storage and distribution, rural doctors can be put behind bar if they resorted to directed blood transfusion during emergencies. The issue was taken up by Dr. Tongaonkar and his like minded colleagues at appropriate level to amend the law in favor of such emergencies. In addition to name and fame in his own field, he had commitment to society and took lot of interest in social activities in and around Dondaicha. He was a president of ANS, Dhule District Unit for number of years. As a Rotarian he conducted number of health camps for poor tribals.

As he rightly mentions in the introduction, many readers may not agree his views about God, soul and alternate therapeutic practices. However he expresses his views on these matters like any other rationalist. He argues against the concept of God and soul and their futility in one's life. He had included a full chapter on 'Alternate medicine and my

experience'. In one of his papers on this subject, he expressed his views that one has to go into details of these methods, do basic scientific research as stipulated by modern science. A well-established hernia can't be treated by any other means except surgery. He does not believe in any unscientific treatment. In addition to problems faced by rural surgeon in his professional life, he had to face the problem of children's education. In spite of his busy schedule, Tongaonkar took full responsibility of parenting of his one daughter and two sons. The family is the basic social unit of the society and therefore, the quality of parenting is a reflection of the quality of our society. We need to examine our parenting and question how we raise our children. Tongaonkar ensured that his children did not inherit the issues and problems that he had faced or sometimes ignored. He is now a retired person and has handed over the responsibility to his son who is practicing in same way as his father did.

As Dr. T E Udwadia, Head of the Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH) puts it aptly "This book cannot be reviewed – it has to be read."

Prabhakar Nanawaty

### **Making of a Rural Surgeon** *An Autobiography*

- Dr. R R Tongaonkar, Price Rs.170, pp 243

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## **SWEET AND SOUR**

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Despite the warning of a possibility of an outbreak of waterborne disease in the wake of people in Mumbai drinking 'sweet' seawater at the Mahim beach, the effect of reason has been zilch. Thousands continue to throng the location, scooping up the sewage contaminated water in their palm and filling bottles to take the water home to let its supposedly miraculous powers make an impact. Meanwhile, the municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board have been shouting themselves hoarse, pointing out

that this is not an unusual phenomenon and has nothing to do with any divine intervention. Since their explanations have been drowned, the officials can now do little except for keeping vigil on all hospitals in the city and suburbs for any case of gastroenteritis. So far there has been none does not mean that the danger can wished away. And strangely enough, hundred of people have begun to throng Teethal beach at Valsad, Dumas in Surat and Kambhoi in Bharuch district following reports that the sea water has turned sweet. This is one more headache added to the long list that the Gujarat government is already grappling with following the flooding of cities like Surat and Ahmedabad.

What's really ironical is the way the people will go crazy when it comes to blind faith. There comes into play the absolute suspension in of logic and the best explanations offered by the scientific community will be slapped around as being nothing more than the disgruntled voice of cynics. The same thing had happened a few years ago with reports of statues of Lord Gnash drinking milk and now there has been a report about Shiva drinking milk too. How and why does the fervour work? According to one explanation, most people are so fed up with the grim realities of life that the slimmest straw of hope and escape that swings into view is grabbed at the quickest. Yet, what is equally disturbing is the deep-rooted psychological weirdness that exists in the minds of people who will drink sea water but will also quite ready to plant bombs in temples and mosques and kill innocent people in the name of fundamentalism or communalism. What kind of malady is it that affects them? While it is true that belief in God or any power that is beyond our comprehension offers an anchor amidst the turmoil of living, is it necessary to stretch the dependence beyond all limits of sanity? At the Mahim beach, parents are forcing their children to gulp down murky seawater. What will they do if they fall ill? Blame God?

Isn't it strange that science cannot counter blind faith?

*Courtesy: Maharashtra Herald*

## DESTINATION RATIONALITY

"The progressive state of Maharashtra has ten tribal dominated districts. Each of them witness killing of women every week because the tribals believe they are witches. An unusual death occurs in a village. A healthy boy falls sick and dies. The tribals approach a bhagat for advice. "A witch's doing," he says and describes her: a fair woman, two children, and lives in a hut in northern part of the village. The vague description fits many, but the villagers decide upon one. This woman is tortured. She is beaten up by the bhagat and made to pay unaffordable expenses of pujas and feast. An estimated 500 women die this way each year only in Nandurbar district. The life of their children gets worse than it already is". This is Dr Narendra Dabholkar, founder executive president of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee talking about prevailing superstitions.

A Left-leaning activist then, closed his hospital in 1982 to devote himself to eradication of superstitions and established the organisation in 1987. Its goals are: to eradicate exploitative superstitions, cultivate scientific temper among the people, critically and actively examine religions, and tread the path of reason in per suite of a moral life in today's unethical world. Instability and helplessness, the common denominator in today's life, often nurture superstition. "Reason may not be able to change the system but helps an individual to survive without succumbing to superstitions." He says. The Samitee which has 180 branches across all the districts of Maharashtra works to develop scientific temper. It conducts a superstition eradication course for primary and secondary school teachers regularly. So far, nearly 12000 teachers have completed it. The Samitee's Rs 12 lakh mobile science exhibition visits schools in rural areas and explains simple and interesting scientific principles and facts. Samitee activists demonstrate all the miracles usually performed by 'Godmen' to impress gullible devotees.

The Samitee organises protests against superstitious activities wherever they occur. It has been demonstrating against animal



sacrifice at various centres (Almost six lakhs animals are sacrificed each year in Maharashtra.), and immersion of Ganesh idols in water resources (One crore idols or two crore kg of Plaster of Paris, toxic chemicals and synthetic colours containing mercury, lead particles enter into drinking water). It advocates simple, less expensive, inter-caste marriages and pre-marriage HIV tests.

The Samitee's efforts have led to the passing of a law against superstitions by the Maharashtra Assembly. The Legislative Council is yet to pass the same. The vital point is that there now is a consensus on what superstitious activity is and what can be stopped by the law. "Earlier when we protested against exploitation of superstitious people, the police would ask us to tell them under what law they could act. Now that problem will be overcome", says Dabholkar. The Samitee gets no government or agency funding. Its members spend their own money while working for the organisation and accept donations from sympathisers during its rallies, demonstrations and protests.

Asked if the average human being is equipped the minimum quantum of rationality and enthusiasm needed to live without superstitions, Dabholkar says: "I'm optimistic. I've had my ups and downs in life. But I never felt a need of such a power".

Subhash Abooj

Courtesy: *Indian Express*

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## SHANKARRAO MORE'S IDEOLOGICAL WORLD

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Writing has been my hobby for quite some time but I had never ventured into writing a book. My elder brother, Dadasaheb Naiknavare, was keen that a biographical book should be written on Shankarrao More,

who was a household name in Maharashtra for quite a few years and had considerable, useful work to his credit, done in his life time. After the preliminary work, I started writing my book on More's ideological world \*. I planned my book that would give an account of More's ideas and his precious activities based on his ideals and his social and political strivings. Apart from the urge of my brother, there was one more reason that impelled me to undertake the writing of a book on More's ideas and his social and political activities in pursuance of his idealism. More was leading the dedicated life of a social reformer and he sacrificed his personal creature-comforts, with a view to organizing, educating and inspiring a social revolution in Maharashtra. He was fired by the idealism of Jotirao Phule and was eager to carry forward the good work that Phule tried to do all his life. I was eager to delineate the ideas and idealism which inspired Shankarrao More to carry on the social reform, pioneered by Satya Shodhak Samaj founded by Jotirao Phule.

After India achieved independence in 1947, it was hoped that most of our problems would be solved by our own Government once the obstacle of British rulers was removed. Not that overnight there would be complete happiness for the poor and ignorant majority of our countrymen all at once. But the hope was that the march towards that ideal would start after independence. That however would be possible, if only a social revolution is attempted by the enlightened youth by carrying an active movement based on Phule's idealism. Unfortunately this all important need was realised by a few brave souls. Excepting such rare people, there was hardly any enthusiasm for social reforms and economic emancipation of the masses after independence. Shankarrao More was one of this rare species of activists in Maharashtra. He tried to do work in the rural areas to spread education, to encourage rural reconstruction and to build up energetic local self-government. This aspect of his life was very important and was likely to inspire other selfless activists to do work in such a social movement. That was the motive in my urge to write a book on Shankarrao More's ideological world.

The anti-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra was trying to spread a revolt against the caste system and its hierarchical structure based on

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accident of birth. The worst feature of the caste system was the ascribed status, given to each caste, which gave a feeling of being by birth superior to some castes and to some others being lower in the social order. The lowest i.e. Dalits and nomadic tribes were not worthy of even touching for persons of other castes. In fact the anti-Brahmin movement was the logical culmination of the Satya Shodhak movement, started by Jotirao Phule. The movement was not quite successful in removing the psychology of the caste feelings, but it gave a jolt to the age old rigid frame of caste system. It spread discontent against the religious rigid mental barriers of the caste system. Afterwards this revolt of the anti-Brahmin movement was utilised by clever politicians to achieve political power through the ballot box.

It might be perhaps argued that those movements for social change and economic liberation of the poor have little relevance for India that one sees today. This, however, is a great illusion. Booming stock markets and increasing growth rates of Indian economy cannot hide the plight of the vast majority of Indian people. Our entrepreneurs and middle classes may be euphoric about their new prosperity. Surely globalisation and technology have brought viable affluence to them. Even so these classes form a small portion of our population. Out of the 1.1 billion people about 800 million earn two dollars a day or less. Ending malnutrition and corruption, reforming infrastructure or education and healthcare are formidable problem and it will take generations to achieve tangible results in these areas. When this is borne in mind, the importance of Shankarrao More was faithfully and tirelessly doing throughout his life can be easily appreciated.

Those whose vision is circumscribed by what they see around them in their immediate neighbourhood, comprising the prosperous middle class in its abundant wealth, are apt to forget the poor. Such people have mistaken ideas of Indian reality. Let them not overlook the fact that finding enough water to drink is an usual battle for tens of millions. In fact breaking poverty remains all too evident all around those who will see. To fight the abject and painful poverty of India as also colossal ignorance of the masses is the foremost duty

Thought & Action

of all of us. Shankarrao More was pioneer fighter of this noble front.

Vishwas Naiknavare

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***Tirapi Topi Taath Maan:  
Shankarrao More  
Yanche Vicharvishwa  
(More's ideological World)***

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Vishwas Naiknavare,  
Continental Publishers,  
Vijaynagar Pune 411030  
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## **Thus Spake Buddha**

*Do not believe what you have heard.*

*Do not believe in the tradition because it is handed down many generations.*

*Do not believe in anything that has been spoken many times.*

*Do not believe because the written statements come from some old sage.*

*Do not believe in conjecture.*

*Do not believe in the authority or teachers or elders.*

*But after careful observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and it will benefit one and all, then accept and live by it.*

# RATIONALISM AND SCIENTIFIC TEMPERAMENT

## The All Pervading Superstition

Our country is steeped in superstition. We imbibe too many dos and don'ts since our childhood, almost all of them irrational and we are not even aware of it. We get up in the morning thinking of what day it is. If it happens to be a Saturday, we are expected not to start any new, good project for it will certainly prove a failure; if it is a Sunday women should not wash their hair as this act will lead to their brother's death; Tuesday is a day when new garments if worn for the first time catch fire because Tuesday (Mangalwar) is named after the Planet Mars that is a fiery planet and so on and so forth. For doing any thing we have to find out an auspicious moment and wait for it. For every little thing we are ready to surrender to God and accept His Will. As if all this is not enough we need Babas, Gurus, Buvas, Matajis, Devijis to intervene between us and the Almighty as far as Hindus are concerned. The other religionists too have their own intermediaries of this type to tell them what they should or shouldn't do. Pujaris, Priests, Maulavis and such other parasites are ever ready to help us through this arduous journey of life. We are so enamoured of these godmen and their supernatural powers as well as their sweet soothing tongue that we gladly lose our ability to think and judge and question. This is about you and me, the common people.

Men in Power: But what about those who are in power, those who are responsible for shaping and cultivating our youth, our younger generations, the future of our nation? Our erstwhile Rashtrapati visited all the live deities that never fail their devotees to take a vow that he would visit them again on being elected President of India and religiously visited them again to fulfill his vows; of course with all the entourage of a Rashtrapati. Our ministers attend the birthday celebrations of many Babas and Buvas who claim to possess supernatural powers, that as some people say is very useful for money laundering and such other essential activities! One can quote innumerable examples of these great and powerful peoples' superstitious behaviours.

Now about those who are shaping the pillars of our society's future.

Our Universities: Our universities, thankfully not all of them, have introduced a new subject- Astrology- mind you, not Astronomy, at the post graduate level. Attempts were made to introduce a novel subject, viz., Paurohitya in the University, the grand objective being the spread of our ancient Vedic culture and traditions and of course the ancient rituals all over the world. Vedic Mathematics, Vastushastra are in waiting to acquire a place in the annals of university education. Other obscure subjects like Reiki, Transcendental meditation, Art of living and a number of Yogic therapies are gaining importance to day. It is not possible to deal with each of these fads separately but let us take the example of the ubiquitous Vastushastra.

Vastu Shastra: As the very name implies it is a science of building. As per the claims of the Vastushastris, their fantastic remedial changes in buildings, small and big, guarantee these Vastushastra buffs all health, wealth and happiness. Many eminent scientists and technocrats, industrialists and businessmen, psychiatrists and surgeons, engineers and even architects themselves fall pray to this dubious science. They make many impractical and at times dangerous structural changes in their office buildings, industrial edifices and workshops, hotels and dwellings and what not, expecting that these changes will make them happy ever after. Those who are able to taste success, obviously because of their acumen, expertise and hard work, talk loudly about the efficacy of the ancient science. Those who don't, keep quiet because it's not the science of Vastu that is to be blamed but the imperfect or half hearted following of it is what brought them misery. Quite a few buildings, it is said, are dangerously damaged because of the changes made according to the requirements of Vastushastra; leave alone the unnecessary expenses and inconveniences caused because of the changes.

Our Litterateurs: This whole lot of rich and powerful does not include our literary luminaries. They are not behind any of these eminent people in acquiescing with



superstitious and irrational practices in the name of tradition. One has only to recollect the way the president of the Sahitya Sammelan defended the sacrifice of a buffalo for the success of the Sammelan without any untoward happenings. Can we then blame the ignorant, superstitious poor people who sacrifice lakhs of goats for appeasing their deities during the Jatras. I must mention here that in the recent Mandhar Dev Jatra goat sacrifice was banned, thanks to Maharashtra Government that finally woke up after the ghastly incident of the previous year when too many lives were lost.

**The Bill:** Now let us turn to the bill 'The Maharashtra Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Practices and Customs Act 2005' that was recently passed in the legislative assembly banning harmful superstitious practices. The bill seeks to prohibit practice, promotion and propagation of Black Magic. A comprehensive definition of the term 'practice of Black Magic' contains the evil practices, customs, etc., and also the unauthorized and illegal practice of medicine or healing or curing by quacks, conmen and the so called godmen. Such practice is being made an offence under this act and to serve as a deterrent it is proposed to provide for a stringent penalty and punishment, making such a practice a cognizable and non-bailable offence.

The Bill also provides for the appointment of vigilance officers to detect and prevent such offences and collect evidence against the offenders. This will help to prosecute the offenders effectively. It provides for recognition of Social Organizations that are committed to social cause. They are expected to help achieve eradication of these evil practices and implementation of the provisions of law.

It empowers the court to convict and punish a person for committing an offence under this law.

Many people believe that making a law cannot eradicate blind faith and the exploitation of the poor and ignorant. What we need is awakening, education and economic well being of the people. No doubt, we need all this and many social organizations are creating awareness among the poor people and helping them to help themselves. But, you will

surely agree with me that this is a long drawn process and gives respite to the unscrupulous conmen till people eventually become aware. Till then the conmen merrily go on with their nefarious activities. A law to stop these malpractices and to bring the culprits to book will certainly accelerate the process of educating the people and creating awareness among them. It will also give teeth to organizations that are fighting superstition.

**Miracles:** We have entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a lot of pomp and show. We have successfully sent satellites in space and improved our communication facilities tremendously due to TV and innumerable channels of entertainment and news, weather forecasting, mobile telephones and what not. We have indigenously developed our own missiles and even nuclear weapons making us independent as far as the defence of our country is concerned. We have constructed big highways and small roads reaching many small towns and villages. We use tractors and fertilizers and hybrid seeds in our agriculture. We have most talented doctors and engineers, Technocrats and management experts, economists and entrepreneurs in our country. In the field of ET, great countries like USA are alarmed at our progress. The list can grow ad infinitum. But with all this advancement we also believe in all sorts of miracles. We believe that the Baba can obtain things from thin air by just waving his hands. He is able to bless his rich and powerful devotees gold chains, diamond rings and expensive Swiss watches. We believe that there are Christian missionaries endowed with supernatural powers to make a lame person walk, to make the deaf and dumb to hear and talk and to make a blind man see clearly. We still believe that persons with supernatural powers can operate and remove cancerous growths from a person's body solely with their blessed fingers without any instruments or anesthesia. That we believe in such things and encourage their perpetrators even though we are capable of much scientific and technological advancement is the greatest miracle! I believe this is the reason why India is still a backward country. Instead of looking forward we still look into our 'glorious past' for support and sanction for any action. What are the reasons for this state of affairs?

### Scientific Temper

Although we have eminent scientists and technocrats, we have failed to develop scientific temper as such in most of our scientists. No need to speak about common people who totally lack scientific temperament without which it is not possible to overcome blind faith and superstition. Let us see what scientific temperament means. Before finding out what is scientific temperament, we have to discuss how man has arrived at this enhanced state of intelligence.

**Evolution of Man:** Every one, except for a few adamant doctrinaires, agrees that man has evolved through millennia in the process of evolution from the lowliest animals. Scientists believe that the earth was born at least 4 ½ billion years ago. 80 % of the time since then is called the Precambrian time. Bacteria are the first living things that existed since nearly 3 ½ billion years ago. By the end of this period i.e. 1100 million years ago, Coral Jelly fish and worms lived in the sea. Cone bearing trees, fish, amphibians and reptiles appeared around 290 million years ago. Primitive apes and other mammals appeared 38 million years ago while modern human beings developed only 2 million years ago. But only in the last 10000 years have they tamed animals, developed agriculture and learned to use metals and coal. They are however progressing in leaps and bounds now. Why did it become possible for human beings, the weakest of all animals to surpass all other living things in such a short time? What are the factors responsible for this progress?

**Man's Brain:** The first factor that made it possible is the human brain. Man does not possess the biggest brain. His brain weighs only 1 ½ kg while an elephant's brain weighs 4 kg. But the crux of the matter is the proportionate weight of man's brain. The elephant that is around here on the earth for 40 million years has a 4 kg brain for his 4000 kg of body weight as compared to 1 1/2kg brain for 70 kg of an average man's body weight. Thus the elephant's brain is 1/1000 i.e. 1% of his body weight as compared to man's brain which is 3/140 his body, i.e. 2.14% of his body weight. A human baby is born with an especially high ratio of 12% of brain mass to body mass.

**Man's Opposable Thumb:** Another important factor is the opposable thumb of man. His thumb can oppose and touch any of his fingers which facility no other primate is blessed with, although the human set of genes differs very little from that of the apes. This opposing thumb has made man a tool making animal. Starting from using a simple stick man progressed in making various tools and weapons acquiring control over his surroundings.

**The Speech Organ:** The third factor, equally important, is man's versatile voice box that makes speech possible. With the help of this voice box and his brain, not only did man build up language but also acquired the ability of abstract thinking. His thinking has historicity as well as teleology. His thinking is historically true as well as purposeful. All this has become possible because of the language that made accumulation of knowledge gained through thousands of years and hundreds of generations feasible. Apes are not able to build such a vast store of knowledge. Now man has developed very efficient means of acquiring and storing knowledge and retrieving it at the appropriate time and the gap between man and other creatures is widening giving man control over the existence of other species.

The larger brain, the opposing thumb and the voice box developed in consonance with each other, enhanced man's capacity to think, to investigate, to experiment and draw conclusions. But out of the 2 million years that man has been around on this planet earth, he began a settled life only about the last 10000 years ago. The earlier 1 ½ million years of his existence were spent dwelling in caves. The invention of fire gave him some sort of security. Invention of agriculture brought stability in his life. But the Scientific Era ushered in around 500 years back due to the scientific temperament has revolutionized his life altogether.

**Indian Inventions and Scientific Temper:** Many patriotic Indians claim that the Scientific Outlook is nothing new to us. We had airplanes and atom bombs in the ancient times. We called them Pushpak Viman and Brahmastra. Granting this just for the sake of argument, the question arises where did all this technology that we are so proud of disappeared? And more importantly why such an advanced nation has now reached an abominable present state

where many of our compatriots suffer from utter poverty, failure of crops for lack of water, power cuts and inadequate transport facility and other infrastructure? Whatever we had, although debatable was certainly not the philosophy of what we presently call the Scientific Temperament. What we did have were computations, estimates, conjectures and sometimes conclusions arrived at after long and consistent study and observations.

**India's Contribution in the Past:** Through this endeavour India contributed considerably to the world's knowledge reserve. The invention of zero by Bhaskaracharya that helped solve the difficulty in writing (or even thinking) of huge sums in mathematics; the discovery of combining copper, silver or gold to form amalgamates made by Nagarjuna, Amarsinha's classification of plants and animals, Sushruta's skill in surgery (including the rudiments of what is called Plastic surgery today) and development of instruments that were required for it and the Ayurvedic Medicinal system have made great contribution to the progress of humanity and the world has acknowledged it. Varahmihir knew that the sun is a star and in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD Arya Bhatta proposed that not the earth but the sun is the center around which the earth revolves. It was difficult for people in those days to understand how one can stand on the ground that is constantly moving under his feet or come back to his hearth and home after leaving it in the morning when the earth will carry it away. This discourse of refuting Aryabhatta's proposition was a healthy sign of being mentally alert. But alas! It lasted only till the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

The great contributions that India made till then were the outcome of meticulous observations, inferences drawn from experience and discussions. This process of thinking can not be called Scientific Temperament. After this, the next 11-12 centuries were simply barren as far as Science was concerned. There had been a few good kings, philosophers and litterateurs, but no scientists. The discourses carried out by Indians during this period consisted of traditions, rituals, religion, Philosophy or at the most politics. But the rest of the world was speedily going in a totally different direction. In 1550 the Portuguese brought the art of

printing to Goa. But we took 300 years to bring this revolutionary invention to India.

**What is Scientific Outlook:** That our society should be devoid of scientific temperament was not acceptable to our Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. So she made an amendment to the constitution in 1976 to include a citizen's responsibility into it. So far the constitution included only the rights of the citizens and among the responsibilities was the most important one, viz., 'Every citizen has the responsibility to propagate Scientific Outlook, Inquisitive Intellect and Humanism.' Rajeev Gandhi included an important core factor in his 'Declaration on the Educational Policy'. Inculcating Scientific Temperament was one of the main objectives of education according to it. Let us discuss in brief what is this 'Scientific Outlook or Temperament' and why is it considered so important? It is not at all hard to find out what it is. We will go step by step with the constituents of Scientific Temperament.

All of us wittingly or unwittingly make use of it in our workaday life because whether we like it or not, we are born with the ability to think logically! It means that to believe in anything, we need evidence of its being true. A child will refuse to hold a burning piece of charcoal in his hands even if ordered to do so because he 'knows that it will burn his fingers' through his own or some other person's experience; he has enough evidence to believe so. Scientific outlook will not let us believe in anything unless we have evidence to do so. Collecting enough evidence is an important constituent of this outlook.

Now the question arises as to how to verify the evidence that we collect. The method of doing this is called the Scientific Method. It consists of four factors: Observation, Reasoning, Inference and Verification. Verification has three aspects. It should be done directly. Secondly 'Verifying a fact' just once is not enough. It should be verified again and again and found to be true every time provided the conditions are same. And thirdly verification should be possible at any place, any time and by any body which means it should be universal. So verification should fulfill these three conditions- it should be direct, duplicable and universal. Suppose for example, someone tells you that such and such Baba gives a charmed ring that gives an unemployed person a job within a month of his

wearing that ring on his finger. Not only he but his friend too who worn that ring got a job within a month. Is this much evidence of its effectiveness enough? Certainly not. You need a large number of such cases to draw any conclusion. More over your friend does not tell you how many men and women wearing these rings did not get any job. But you can verify this claim by distributing several such enchanted rings to hundreds of unemployed young men, spread all over the country and tell them to use the rings and report if they do or don't get employment within a month. And again you will have to repeat this experiment several times to see whether you get results consistently at different periods of time. If the results of these tests repeated in time as well as places and by different people are statistically significant, then only can we say that the claim is true since our verification would be direct, duplicable and universal.

Then comes the stage of Experiment. After verifying the evidence one can draw conclusions which are to be tested again through experimentation. When proved repeatedly it becomes a theory. Again experimentation to test any theory should be possible for any body at any time any where. During the last century science has matured so much that theories are built not on the basis of direct observation and experience but through thought process. Einstein conceived his theory of special relativity not through direct experiment but through a 'Thought Experiment'. Among other predictions, he predicted that as any body travels faster, approaching the speed of light, that body is compressed in the direction of motion, its mass increases and time as it experiences slows down. It has been proved by experience. Very accurate clocks carried in supersonic jet planes slow down a little compared to stationary clocks. Nuclear accelerators are designed to allow for the increase of mass with increasing speed; the accelerated particle would otherwise smash into the walls of the apparatus. But even this theory will be discarded if any evidence contradicting any of its prediction is made available. It is believed to be true only as long as it works and gives results.

This method of collecting and verifying facts, drawing conclusions from them, and constructing theories to be proved or disproved through further evidence and experimentation and thereby add to humanity's vast store of knowledge is Scientific Method. And those who use this method to acquire knowledge as a base for their belief do have a Scientific Temperament. Our ancient Astronomers, Chemists-Metallurgists, Mathematicians, Architects and Engineers, Ship Builders, Medicine Men, Surgeons and all were truly great men but they did not possess this scientific temperament. There was not much criticism, debate or discourse on their assumptions, inferences, finding or theories. Their theories were not put to use for the benefit of the common people. There was hardly any experimentation.

Even in Europe, the change in attitude of the people has taken place only five/six centuries ago. Since Renaissance Europe was intellectually stirred. Thomas More in his 'Utopia' 1 and 2 exposed the shallowness and pomposity of the high society. A tradition of Rational Philosophy was ushered in by Spinoza, and Liberalism propagated by John Lock. Bruno, Francis Bacon, Rene de Carts and later Voltaire and David Hume gave impetus to both rational, secular and liberal traditions. On the other hand Guttenberg brought literacy to common man, Copernicus, Galileo, Harvey with their discoveries in astronomy and physiology shattered the very foundation of God and religion. With the steam engine invented by James Watts began the industrial revolution. Side by side the reformation movement started making politics secular which finally culminated into a movement for separation of the church and the state. Pursuit of knowledge, science and experimental method, dignity of crafts and mechanical arts began rolling in full speed. The French Revolution and the American Revolution brought in democracy i.e. rule of the people, for the people, by the people along with the principles of Equality, Fraternity and freedom. This kind of intellectual, political and societal churning did not take place in India. As a result the scientific temperament could not be engendered in the minds of common people. They remained ignorant and superstitious, gullible and helpless. This does not mean that



there are no superstitious people in the West, but about it later.

The Scientific Temperament has moral and ethical content. It tries to tell us how a human being should look at his life. The first point is the need to look at any problem comprehensively. When in 1993 the monsoons failed in Maharashtra, the Governor of the state appealed to the people to pray to their respective gods to send rains. Here what is needed is not religious minds and their ardent prayers but a comprehensive study of why the monsoons fail, what could be done to ameliorate people's hardships caused by it and strive to find a permanent solution to this recurring problem. It is known the world over that if the rain water is stopped from flowing and is allowed to be soaked up by the soil, about 500 mm of rain is enough to provide drinking water and other needs of the people and in addition enough water for one annual crop with appropriate water management. This has been successfully tried at places like Aadgaon and Ralegan Siddhi by Vijay Borade and Anna Hajare.

The second point is the principle is Autonomy. It means that this universe is self existing. It is bound by cause –effect relationship and the cause-effect relation of every event can be traced. Although we are not yet able to establish such relationship for every event- e.g. the cause of cancer- but we know the method and would be able to do so sooner than later. That is why we can be sure that it is not controlled by any external agency, good or evil. It, therefore follows that we need not worship any agency that is capable of doing good by us nor do we need to appease any evil agency in order not to incur its wrath. Nothing that is not in consonance with the natural laws can happen in this universe. Denial of any outside controlling agency makes our life much less arduous.

Next is to cultivate our innate tendency to search for truth, trying to find out the root cause of every thing that happens around us. Our curiosity drives us to discover the secrets of nature that happen to be beyond our understanding. Some times these truths avail us nothing and religion tells us that we should not wish to learn them. Yet no advance in civilization would have been possible if human

beings had not cultivated and used their curiosity.

Scientific temperament involves one more value, i.e. fearlessness. Any newly discovered scientific truth invariably invites bitter opposition by the established system-religion, state, tradition or whatever. Of course in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries scientific research and findings and the scientists are respected. But had the scientists like Bruno, Galileo, Darwin succumbed to the pressure and threats of the church and the state, we still would believe that the earth is flat and still gloating over the assurance that God has made man in his own image. Nearly 70 years back Dr. D.D. Karve urged and entreated people to perceive the danger of population explosion and take steps to control it. He was ridiculed and practically ostracized by the society. He was even indicted in the court of law for using vulgar language. But he never relented and pursued his mission of making people aware of the menace and take precaution in time. Had his message been heeded to a number of today's problems would not have been there.

The last and the most important value of scientific temper is humility. It never takes the position that any truth discovered by this approach is the ultimate truth. Every one should accept it since there is nothing beyond that truth. Religions, on the other hand claim to know every thing including the ultimate truth and reality. They cannot tolerate any disbelief. Science, on the contrary maintains that whatever it knows is based on the presently available evidence and if any contradictory evidence comes to light, the present position will have to be changed. For religions the word of their prophets is final and should not be doubted.

**Healthy, Critical Life Stance:** Why did we fail to develop a critical, healthy stance towards life in our society, while it could take roots in the Western society to at least some extent? There are a number of reasons for this.

The first is the dictatorship of the head of the family. In Marathi it is aptly called 'Baba Wakyam Pramanam.' It means the wish of the head of the family is every body's command. We never consult our children for taking any decision. Nor is any problem discussed in the family with all members freely applying their minds and expressing their views. The head of



the family necessarily is the father or a male member. Even the mother has no say in this matter. Surprisingly most women willingly let their husbands take decisions without their being consulted.

The second reason in my opinion is our tendency to idolize great men. Shivaji, Babasaheb Ambedkar and now many 'great' political leaders are idolized by their followers. Any unflattering word uttered regarding them provokes their followers to teach you a fitting lesson. Once Kamal Padhye and her husband Prabhakar Padhye attended a private musical concert along with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In her Memoirs, 'Bandha-Anubandha,' Kamal Padhye casually mentioned that Babasaheb did not really understand classical music. This innocuous statement provoked a Dalit friend, 'how dare this woman write such a thing about the great man that Babasaheb was!' The fact is that not understanding classical music does not make Babasaheb less great. Yet one should abstain from pointing out any limitation in 'their' great hero although he too is a mortal human being. This idolization hampers free thought and in turn development of Scientific Attitude.

Veracity of tradition is one more reason of this stagnating attitude. When criticism is not tolerated in the family and criticism of great men is a taboo, religion-customs-traditions are, as you might expect, sacrosanct. Many of our traditions and customs are harmful and economically wasteful. But we insist that they ought to be observed. Take the example of 'Akshata'- the rice colored with vermilion is showered on the heads of the couple getting married. In one marriage 5 to 10 kg rice is used up. Every year three lacs marriages are performed in Maharashtra causing a colossal waste of thirty lacs kg of rice. But people hate being told that instead of wasting this rice literally throwing it to the wind it could be given to some charitable institution.

From child hood we are expected not to ask questions. This is one important reason why we have failed to develop a healthy critical life stance. Our educational system engenders rote learning and not enquiry and asking questions. The child is full of curiosity and wants to know how and why of every thing. But the policy in the house is that a child is to be seen and not heard. In the school, the

teacher has so many brats on her hands and has to 'finish' the course in the syllabus. She cannot afford to waste time in answering worthless rubbish questions. The child is expected to sit like an idol of a deity-speechless, motionless, unconcerned and uninvolved-only listening and trying to grasp what the teacher says.

**Scientific Outlook and Morality:** People often ask me, 'Dr.Dabholkar, you talk so much about this blessed Scientific Outlook. Do you really think that developing this kind of outlook or life stance is all that one needs to do? Is it going to make the whole world happy? Why is America, despite being such an advanced state scientifically and technologically, beset with so many problems?' Here we must keep in mind that Americans with all their advance in science have yet make this life stance their own. They have not yet fully imbibed the scientific outlook. Similarly in our country, too, no doubt science and education has spread. But the fact remains that today's educated scientists too are not as steeped in scientific attitude as were the workers of the 'Satyashodhak' movement were 100 years back. Scientific outlook is the most appropriate way of acquiring right and precise knowledge. It does not promise answers to all questions But it does start the process of getting answers. Going beyond acquisition of knowledge, people behave morally or immorally according to their own outlook, scientific or religious. One with a Scientific Outlook can be a cruel man like Stalin or the most religious Harshad Mehta who abstained from even onions and garlic on religious grounds can cheat people of their hard earned money and the whole monetary system by thousands of crores of rupees. The behavior of a person depends on his discretion, his understanding of what is good and what is not, his moral values which is related to rationality. Morality is developed through a man's thinking and reasoning. It is rightly said that 'right thinking is the way to right conduct'. The conduct of a religious person may be right but right thinking and reasoning cannot be devoid of scientific attitude. Rationality, that is better expressed in Marathi as 'Vivek' is, therefore Scientific Outlook + moral values (or value system).

#### **Utility of Scientific Outlook**

The scientific outlook is necessary for solving individual problems as well as national

problems. The problems of common people's life are decided by the society and many times the decisions are taken at the level of high government officials. Sometimes the policy decisions that affect the common people most are taken without any consideration for the hardships that they are likely to suffer. But if all people approach their problems with a scientific outlook, all the parties will have better understanding of the problems and their response will be positive. But in India where ever we go-may be factory, a farm, an office or even a cabinet meeting- each individual is provided with minimum information. Criticizing or asking questions is not allowed. A person is expected to do the job allotted to him quietly. No wonder we have failed to develop a proper productive work culture. Now take a look at this contrast. Jawaharlal Nehru visited the Damodar Valley Project while it was under construction. He approached one of the labourer there, put his hand over his shoulder and asked him, 'Bhai, do you have any idea as to what you are going to raise here?' The poor man had absolutely no idea about the dream project of Nehru and nodded his head in the negative. All that he knew was to fill the huge pit by bringing ballast from elsewhere. Nehru called a meeting of the managerial staff and explained to them about the necessity of enlightening the workers regarding the whole project, its need for the nation and how it will fulfill those needs and that he is a part of this process of nation building. How far Nehru's advice was heeded to, there is no way of knowing. But this is a scientific approach whereby every body knows what he is doing, why he is doing it, what will be the consequence of his action and what is his responsibility.

To day in almost all countries half the scientists and technologists are employed in projects on military matters. They get their salaries, perquisites and power and also public honor at the highest levels. But none of them is ever expected to accept responsibility for their action –be it nuclear reactor for power generation or any weapon of mass destruction. Had they developed a real scientific Outlook they would think of the consequence of their output and in all probability would refuse to work there. Many

scientists during the 2nd World War were apprehensive of participating in the development of atom bomb.

This maturity of understanding is required at all levels. It can be brought about only by engendering the scientific outlook from the very beginning. This alone can bring the broad and essential social change. A Brahmin or any other upper caste Hindu will better understand the difficulties of tribal or lower caste person and help him achieve equality with him whereas a staunch Hindu upper caste man will never accept that those lowly creatures are really his equals. The border issues national as well as provincial will be solved if all the parties think rationally keeping their wishes and desires out of the picture and not succumbing to them.

It is said that our Bharat going to be really Mahan in 2020. India will then be a superpower. What are our criteria for being called a great nation? Is it that we will have a hydrogen bomb instead of the atom bomb or we may produce missiles of very large range and accuracy or we will have a 'Parama-Parama Computer? But what about those devious distinctions- 54% of the world's illiterate, very high child mortality and mothers dying during labour, 300000 villages without drinking water, etc.- that too we will have achieved by then? There is no alternative to right thinking i.e. Scientific Outlook that will give us a broader perspective of social change if we want to bring about human happiness.

Scientific Outlook has two rules to be scrupulously observed.

- There are no sacred truths. All assumptions must be critically examined. Arguments from authority have no place. And
- Whatever is inconsistent with facts be discarded or revised. One must understand the cosmos as it is and not how it should be according to some prophet or philosopher or spiritualist. Obvious is sometimes false and unexpected is at times true. So every thing ought to be verified.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

## CONFERENCE ON RATIONAL THINKING AND SCIENTIFIC TEMPERAMENT

The world changes not because of believers but because of thinkers. Thinkers have an excellent quality: foresight. We have many thinkers who have got this quality among them. They were Gautam Buddha, Mahaveer, Sant Dnyaneshwar, Mahatma Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, etc. All these thinkers lived for the society and they tried to teach good principles to the society principles like Justice, equality, fraternity and secularism. When people in India will follow these principles with rational thinking and scientific temperament, We can able to see the fulfillment of our 2020 dream India. These were the thoughts expressed by all the eminent speakers in Three Day National Conference on "Rational Thinking and Development of Scientific Temperament" which was held in Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana's College of Arts, Science and Commerce at Wagholi. This conference is inaugurated by Dr. Narendra Dabholkar. Mr. P. C. Nahar, president of Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana Executive Council, presided over the function.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar gave the keynote address and he expressed his thoughts and said this kind of conference is always helpful for bringing awareness about rational thinking and scientific temperament among Indian masses. Even we can solve the national problems. On the other hand in India we do find people who follow many superstitions and they are being victimised by few selfish people that should be taken away from the society.

Dr. D. D. Bandishte retired Professor of Philosophy from Indore delivered a speech on 'Rational Thinking' He said that when we thing good for all people that is a rational thinking. Then he took us into the realm of nature and gave few examples such as who is the creator of rain? Who is runner of the world? Does God exist? All these questions are irrational.

Dr. Hemchandra Adhikai, retired scientist of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre delivered a speech on "What is Scientific Temperament". In science we do experiments, we observe

things and then we come to the conclusion, when we follow these principles in order to find truth it will become a scientific temperament. He concluded his speech by saying we can solve many problems only when we think scientifically and rationally.

The second day of conference begun with Mr. Deepak Girme's speech on 'Religion and Science'. He said that man is a social animal and man has changed society whenever he needed that change. In religion people can believe in anything without any scientific support to their thinking and because of that in society we are having many problems. Religion is based on traditions, faith beliefs. If we want to change this whole scenario we will have to start asking questions. When we start asking questions there a rationality and scientific temperament comes in.

Mr. Arvind Pakhale delivered a lecture on 'Vastushastra'. He said 'Vastushastra' is written long long ago but last 10 years this has become very popular among Indian educated people. These people are being deceived by many people in the name of 'Vastushastra' in order to bring happiness and peace in their home people are spending money as well as they are wasting energy still they can not get psychological satisfaction. He concluded his speech by saying that if we construct our house by taking it to account geographical conditions we can create comfortable houses where we can live comfortably.

Prakash Ghatpande delivered a lecture on 'Astrology' He said that people go to fortune teller for knowing their future. They believe in fortune teller. He said that fortune teller can give you only a temporary psychological comfort and not permanent comfort.

For the valedictory function we had Dr. Naresh Dadhich, Director, Inter University centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics. He classified concepts like what is science, method's of science, development of science etc. We have used methods of science in Physical Sciences and made it rich, but it is the time to use these methods in social sciences so we can make our

society better in future. Further he said science is not against the society. Science can make society better but it depends on who is using science and how we can use science for the progress of society.

Dr. Rajendra Kankariya

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## BLOOD DONATION: HUMANITARIAN TASK

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Nidhi Pandit is a strict person. Even a pregnant cow was afraid of him while he was walking on the village streets. Pandit means a highly earned man. But it has opposite meaning in case of Nidhi Pandit. He used to hate the people belonging to lower caste. Pandit used to get annoyed at their shadows also. He was the first man of the village who took bath in the pond of the village. After his bath only others were going to pond.

Once Nidhi Pandit was returning home with a jug of water and was murmuring some Mantra. On the opposite side Kasia, son of Dasia Bauri, an untouchable person, was coming. Unknowingly the napkin of Kasia touched the body of Pandit. Pandit burnt with anger. He threw the jug of water on the face of Kasia. Blood started flowing from the forehead of Kasia. Even then the anger of Nidhi Pandit did not reduce. He said in a very gruff manner and voice "Oh! This lower caste society will not allow me to live here peacefully. They have already forgotten to obey Guru Brahmin". He blamed the preset time also. He scolded the boy saying "Rascal, don't you know Nidhi Pandit is like King Cobra. As you want to face king Cobra, I am giving a curse that will ruin you completely. There is no way to control this type of person".

Meanwhile, Kapila, a school teacher, saw them and heard the angry words of Nidhi Pandit. He said "Sir, you are a learned and respected person in the village. Why are you quarrelling with such a small boy, just because his napkin touched your body? Is it a

cause to quarrel that too in public? If your sacred water became unsacred, go to pond and fetch once again". After listening, Nidhi Pandit roared "Ah! I know your father and grand father very well. No one dared to utter a single word before me. Just because you are educated does not mean you can show disrespect". Kapila listened patiently and said "OK Panditji! I am not misbehaving with you. This type of discrimination is not expected from a Pandit like you. According to God's creation all are equal. Same blood is flowing in your body as well as of Kasia. Because of such ill feelings between black and white, touchables and untouchables, British were driven out of this country. A time will come you will also be driven out of this village if you misbehave like this. Your monopoly will not last longer".

Pandit was very angry. After threatening both of them he went to fetch water once again. Kasia and Kapila went to blood donation camp arranged in the village. Their blood group was identified and cards were given to them for future use.

After a few days wailing sound came from Nidhi Pandit's house. Kapila came rushing and found that Pandit had succumbed head injury and lot of blood was flowing. He was unconscious. People admitted him in the village hospital. After the treatment Doctor said that blood transfusion is necessary since lot of blood has flown out. Patient may not survive if blood is not given. There was no time to fetch the blood bottles from nearby town. Nobody was ready to come forward and help this arrogant person due to his misbehaviour and short temper. However Kasia remembered his blood identification card and showed it to Doctor. Doctor was very glad and said that your blood is matching. Kasia donated his blood and saved the life of Nidhi Pandit. After few hours Pandit regained his consciousness. Everyone was glad. After his recovery Pandit came to know that Kasia, an untouchable boy has saved his life. After this incident all his prejudices vanished. Now he chants "All are equal; there is no difference between man and man".

Jugal Kishor Sarangi



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# THOUGHT & ACTION

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INSPIRED by a great thinker and philosopher of the oppressed, Babasaheb Dr B R Ambedkar,

**S**INCERELY BELIEVE that the caste problem is not the problem of Dalit alone but also of the entire nation and without Annihilation of Caste and the elimination of other primordial identities, India will not be able to realise its full socio - economic potential and claim its rightful place among the community of nations,

*Vancouver Declaration:  
International Dalit Conference, 2003*

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## **VAASTUSHAASTRA: A PSEUDOSCIENCE**

During the last 15 years or so the so called intellectuals of our society despite being well educated seem to be enamoured of Vaastushaastra- the ancient Indian 'science' of architecture. This ancient Shaastra seems to have disappeared for several centuries before it popped up in the late 80s. The progress of the society was not, however, hampered in any way during this period. On the contrary it is during this period that science has advanced by leaps and bounds bringing about great progress in the life of individual human beings and societies.

Man has made obvious progress through science without the help of Vaastushaastra. "Vaastushaastra" is now being propagated as our great ancestral tradition. It is made out to be scientific in every respect and claims that whoever makes use of it is sure to be successful, healthy, happy and rich'- and is spreading fast in our society. Now this notion that 'this age old Shaastra is completely scientific' ought to be scrutinized. The key principle of science or scientific outlook is that real knowledge is possible only through the perception by sense organs. On this basis, Scientific Method progressed gradually through the processes of observation, investigation, experiment, inference and conclusion. This method gave us the most reliable means of acquiring knowledge.

Since all progress is made possible by this method, it follows that Vaastushaastra that is claimed to be scientific in all respects, should also be examined like any other scientific fact or

construction, applying the criterion of cause-effect relationship. Accepting Vaastushaastra without such examination is inconsistent and dishonest. It means enjoying all the benefits made possible by science and yet adamantly denying science and scientific outlook.

Accepting or denying Vaastushaastra is of course a personal matter; but calling it a science is certainly not. Every one has the right to decide whether it really is a science. Today it is not possible for anyone to deny science, its benefits or its reliability. Being scientific is impressive and prestigious. That is why all these laborious attempts to present Vaastushaastra as a science.

Just applying the law of cause effect to this Shaastra of antiquity will not be appropriate. What we need to do is to take into account the conditions in which it was conceived and initiated, viz., the social environment, the every day dealings and practices of the people and their means of livelihood. It would be instructive to apply scientific criteria to this Shaastra keeping its antiquity in mind and then study how it developed.

From the very beginning man has sensed the need for shelter. Not just man, even animals, birds, ants and insects need shelter. Birds build nests; animals choose caves for refuge; ants live in ant-hills; every creature chooses or builds a shelter according to its needs and as per the dictates of its instinctive and inbuilt neural mechanism. Man being a thinking animal however kept on making changes in his shelter in

accordance with his changing needs. The process of improvement in shelters commenced with the shelter building itself. Vaastushaashtra-science of shelter building- is not a solely Indian phenomenon. Continuous progress in shelter building is universal and it proceeded in accordance with the needs of the various regions, its climate, its culture, the natural calamities it had to face and such other factors. What we need to keep in mind with reference to India's Vaastushaashtra, is the reality of the Aryan invasion and destruction of the native Sandhog culture. Many an advanced culture has been destroyed by an aggressive boorish people in this manner while only a few survived.

Vaastushaashtra, it is said, is a 'science of nature'. And it is not surprising, as all sciences develop as man deliberates on natural events, good or bad that affect human life and hence are related to it. Vaastushaashtra gives the utmost importance to the five natural elements, viz., sky, wind, fire and water. But it cannot be accepted as scientific unless it stands the tests of scientific criteria.

But before verifying whether it is a proper science it is necessary to consider the period when it originated and the effects of the events that occurred then. As per the advocates of this Shashtra, it originated during the Vedic period as a few references of it can be found in the Rig-Veda. The original Indus valley inhabitants had well constructed houses and buildings before the Aryan invasion. To dominate over these inhabitants and to establish their own rule the Aryans had to resort to many tactics. Vaastushaashtra is one of them. Its foundation is the Yadnya

tradition. The Shashtra was developed in the process of building the Yadnya Vedi- the structure built to contain the fire sacrifice. As the Yadnya Institution expanded, it reinforced the Chaturvarnya system and in this process, construction of dwellings became a religious undertaking. This was then associated with awesome mysterious powers that had to be appeased through religious rituals. These powers were named as Gana, Guru, Sthapati, Agatya, Purush, etc. A few other concepts like Vastupurush Mandal and Vastoshpati were established. A number of other concepts like auspicious-inauspicious, ancestors, Vastupurush, Brahma, Ishwar, Swarga, Moksha, Atma, etc. were spawned by this shashtra.

Very well planned cities existed in the Indus valley prior to the Vedic period as has been proved by several excavations in this region. The period when Vaastushaashtra was invented, the social structure of Chaturvarnya engendered by it and the present caste system based on it leads one to infer that Vaastushaashtra was one of the devices that was used to firmly entrench the system of Chaturvarnya in society.

The advocates of Vaastushaashtra quote a few Sanskrit Shlokas by the Sage Bhrigu and maintain that excellent science of architecture (Vaastushashtra), broad well constructed roads, airplanes, and huge edifices existed during the Vedic Period. One researcher-writer once asked a very pertinent question in this connection. It is difficult to refrain from quoting it. He asks these staunch advocates, 'you claim that we did have in the past airplanes and sophisticated weapons.

Our Vedas had already discovered and invented all possible knowledge and technology. All the western discoveries and inventions are derived from Vedic wisdom. Granted, my friends; but did they invent a bicycle at that time?' The most important doubt that arises here is 'how is it that the excavations undertaken at places like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Dholveera etc provide ample evidence of the advanced civilization that existed in the pre-Vedic period; while there is no evidence whatsoever of any scientific or technological advances made by Vedic Civilization after the pre-Vedic period?'

Attempts are made to fit this ancient Vaastushaastra into a scientific frame relating phenomena like wind-direction, solar energy, gravity, etc., to the eight directions considered quite important to it. This relationship is then used to decide whether things and acts are auspicious or inauspicious; whether they will bring riches and happiness or ruin and worry and whether they will lead to success or failure. In reality, however, no scientific conclusions are in any way related to these concepts of auspiciousness or success and failure. Since all the above concepts are related to even more incomprehensible concepts like God, Heaven and Hell, Liberation, etc., things are readily accepted forgoing scientific criteria completely.

This mentality loses all sense of proportion and objectivity when it comes to admiring our ancient culture. A number of branches of science, like Ayurved, Arithmetic, Metallurgy, Chakrasanrita (a book on medicine), Sushruta Sanhita (a book mainly on surgery), including Vaastushaastra were

advanced in the ancient past. Those of them that stopped evolving became obsolete. But a few like Ayurveda not only survived for ages but are still making progress. Continuous research is being carried on in it. Vaastushaastra however was not even heard of till about 20 years back. The reason is not difficult to find. With the passage of time, people must have realized that the principles of Vaastushaastra are in no way scientific. The old Shaastra became obsolete and its advocates had to reinvent it within a 'Modern Vaastushaastra' framework.

As mentioned earlier the influences of all directions are of immense importance in building houses according to Vaastushaastra. They help to assess the effect of climate and to utilize it appropriately. But modern Vaastushaastra that we are analysing seems to focus less on practical utility and more towards scare-mongering with its obscure concepts and the terrible consequences forecast if its prescriptions are not followed. On examining the original Vaastushaastra, the Mayamat, for example, the reader will agree with us. The Mayamata does not even mention earth's magnetic field or the power of the magnetic field to control anybody's future or progress. It only mildly cautions us about the ill effects of not observing the principles of Vaastushaastra in general. The present Vaastushaastra, on the contrary, sternly warns us of terrible consequences like death of sons, penury and total destruction that would follow if the Shaastra is not adhered to. While they claim that the present Shaastra is age old and was developed by our wise ancestors, they conveniently conceal the fact that the original Mayamata, maintains that the various directions affect different Varnas in a different

fashion. Science cares little about caste or Varna of a person. And attributing different objective outcomes based on “Varnas” can hardly qualify Vaastushaastra as “scientific”.

To pass the tests of science the various Vaastushaastras-the Mayamat from the South and the Vishvakarma Prakash from the North to quote just two-should see eye to eye at least on basic principles. Regrettably there is no such agreement in any of the ancient tomes on Vaastushaastra. They all differ in several important respects-effects of direction, the places that various Gods and Goddesses occupy etc. Science does not permit any prejudice or favouritism with respect to caste, religion, country or region.

Yet we cannot fail to notice the natural human tendency of observation, formulating hypothesis on the basis of those observations and relating them to the prevailing conditions, making necessary changes as and when required and thus trying to perfect the Shastra gradually in the books of the old Vaastushaastra. For example, the Mayamat was formulated in the southern part of India in the present state of Kerala. This part is hemmed in by the sea to South and West. The writer of Mayamat naturally concluded that progress is possible only on the remaining two directions, North and East. On the contrary, Vishvakarma of the North India visualized obstruction in the North and East directions because of the insuperable heights of the Himalayas. (p6) For him the West and the South were conducive to progress. The Mayamat looked up to the god Yama for support and emphasized the



west as determining the climate of the region, being the direction of the wind.

With this background the old Vaastushaastra, a primitive science at best, was totally forgotten with the passage of time. In its new pseudo-scientific form it is an endeavour to misguide people and exploit confusion in society. Pseudo-sciences like Vaastushaastra utilize scientific terminology to vindicate themselves and engender many fallacies in the minds of gullible people. Even educated intellectuals are fooled by pseudo-scientific terminology and ignore the defective foundation on which the whole edifice of Vaastushaastra rests. The basis of this pseudo-science is the eight directions. Now these directions are not born of nature. They are man made. How can they be auspicious or inauspicious, beneficial or harmful and so on? The earth rotates round itself on its axis from west to East, so that a person standing on the earth and looking towards the sky sees the stars moving from East to west. It is similar to a rotating giant wheel on which we take

a ride. When the wheel starts moving we see all that is surrounding us moving in a circle, although every thing else except us- the riders on the wheel- is stationary. Similarly we see the sun rising in the East and travelling all the way to the west. Where is the propriety, then, in attaching labels like auspicious and inauspicious to the directions and bestow on them virtues or vices?

The funniest situation can be noticed in the arctic and Antarctic circles where day and night last for six months. One can see the sun in the dead of the night from 21st March to 23rd September. How can the principles of Vaastushastra be applied there? What jugglery the poor Vastushastri would require to undertake to adapt its principles to building scientific Igloos there.

Arvind Pakhale

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**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU once described:**

**“The impact of science and the modern world have brought a greater appreciation of facts, a more critical faculty, a weighing of evidence, a refusal to accept tradition merely because it is a tradition... But even today it is strange how we suddenly become overwhelmed by tradition, and the critical faculties of even intelligent men cease to function... Only when we are politically and economically free will the mind function normally and critically “**

**This was written during the British Raj. Today we live in a free India that is feeling its way towards economic prosperity. Yet we are still a long way away from achieving scientific outlook which Nehru considered so essential for our future well-being.**

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### **BILL ON ERADICATION OF BLACK MAGIC, EVIL PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS**

The ANS completed one more year of its arduous journey by the end of December 1906. We have seen both success and failure taking them in our stride and have resolved to tread the same path of enlightening the people and confronting orthodoxy and the so

called holy men and women and their shrewd exploitative machinations. To this end we endeavoured to get the Law for Eradication of Black Magic, Evil Practices And Customs passed in the winter session of the Legislative Assembly held in Nagpur. Lord Benting,



the British Governor passed the Law prohibiting the tradition of 'Sati' against vehement opposition by the religious luminaries of those days; but our progressive Maharashtra Government could not show the courage to pass the law against Sorcery. So Dr. Dabholkar and Mr. Madhav Bavage proceeded on a fast on the path of self penance like Mahatma Gandhi, to rally popular moral support behind the government, but to no avail. Whether the Government is at all sincere about passing this bill will become clear in the coming Budget Session of the assembly. One thing however is clear that ANS has to carry out a long and still more arduous struggle to get this law passed.

In order to understand the stand taken by ANS we need to go back 11 years when the legislative assembly had unanimously resolved to pass such a law under the leadership of Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh. The draft was revised and accepted four times diluting the law. More than a year back it was passed in the Legislative Assembly and only a formality of passing the bill by the Legislative Council remained. The Chief Minister had then promised to clear it in the next budget session. But to the disappointment of the ANS it was not even presented during the budget session (2006). In the Monsoon session it was presented on the last day of the session presumably to stall it again to be rescheduled in the winter session at Nagpur. The MLC Divakar Ravte spoke against the bill for two and a half hours raising an objection that the bill can not be presented in the assembly as it is against the constitution. The deputy speaker announced that the speaker will give his judgement on it later. Earlier Ravte had raised the same objection

and the speaker had overruled the objection because once the bill is passed in the assembly, no such objection can be raised in the council. Ravte was asked to sit down and the minister for social justice presented the bill. Ravte started speaking again. The discussion remained inconclusive. There after in the press conference held at Satar profuse assurances were given by Honourable Minister Harshavardhan Patil that the bill will be presented before the assembly on the second day, if not on the first, and get it passed by Wednesday in the winter session. It was not expected that the bill would be presented on the first day itself because of the more pressing issues like the 'Khairlanji Killings'. But to the horror of all of us it just disappeared from the agenda! Dr. Dabholkar and Madhav Bavage, as was already decided had by then undertaken the fast already which they continued further.

Their fast was not for opposing anybody, and not in the least, the chief minister. It was only to reinforce the government's political will by enhancing the social will. It was a call to the conscious of the society and the administration. All the credit for passing such a progressive law would have been solely of the chief minister and his cabinet. Our aim was only to expedite the matter, for, its delay is really very painful as it hampers our endeavour to eradicate superstition and stop exploitation of the gullible people.

Those people who were opposed to this law were confronting us to test our determination and people's support to our cause. The big crowds that gathered around us to shore up the ANS were mostly the voters of the Congress

(I). Our challengers were on the other hand, staunch opponents shouting Hindu Rashtrawadi slogans. The Dalit and the Bauddha communities too, forgetting their political stance, came out to support us in large numbers which was quite touching. They saw Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's thought in the proposed law. It is hard to imagine that the chief minister who is an astute and seasoned politician did not detect the opportunity of appeasing this section of the society who feel neglected by the politicians in power. And yet, the fact remains that only the Congress (I) was conspicuous by its absence at the site of the fast. The administration totally ignored it; not even a clerk or a policeman turned up, leave alone any influential personnel like the collector. We learned that many celebrated individuals like Baba Amte, Sadashiv Amrapurkar, G.P. Pradhan faxed their opinions to the Chief Minister but to no avail. Strangely enough some people even imagined that the passing of the law was postponed because the chief minister was annoyed that the fast was undertaken in his constituency, which of course sounds ridiculous.

Now the bill will be presented in the Budget Session. Shivasena had already announced that it will argue at length before the voting on the bill takes place. Hon Chandrakant Handore, the minister for Social Justice demanded that the bill be given top priority which seems to have been disregarded. We fail to understand why all the attempts at getting the bill passed have failed one after the other. Will the chief minister

himself take the people of Maharashtra into confidence and tell them where the bill gets stuck up despite the Chief Minister's support, the opinions of senior administrators, the sentiments expressed in the various newspapers and the assurances of the minister of parliamentary affairs? The chief minister had assured Dr. Dabholkar before the winter session at Nagpur that he will get the bill passed at any cost even if it proves to be the only issue that could be settled and Ulhas Pawar had promised, 'with all faith' that he would look into the matter himself. Then whose magic spell or conjuring is stopping it?

Why does the administration of Vilasrao Deshmukh that could deal with the explosions in the state capital, the deluge of July 2005, the Khairlanji killings, suicides of the farmers and such other calamities prove powerless against the so called supernatural powers of the black magicians and conjurers? Will you tell us the truth Mr. Chief Minister? We are aware that this is difficult and all the more difficult for politicians; and almost impossible when the Municipal and Zilha Parishad elections are to be held shortly. Yet we insist that we be told the truth because we in the ANS too being seized of this issue of superstition are as helpless as you are and will keep puffing and panting like a possessed woman till we achieve our goal. But please also remember that this possession is not without pain and is, in fact, the outcome of the determination of the whole of progressive Maharashtra.

**Suman Oak**

## HOW DOES A GHOST MATERIALIZE?

This is a very popular topic of conversation among the young and old, men and women alike. When the audience is heterogeneous, consisting of kids and elderly as well as adolescent, young and middle aged men and women, the most popular topic is ghost stories. Some people do like a discourse on topics other than ghosts and do stay back and listen attentively.

But those who do not, ensure that no speaker is able to hold such a discourse. There is one more related topic, which almost all people are interested in, listen eagerly and also appreciate. That topic is 'mind, mental illness, haunting and possessing.'

There is a reason for this extraordinary interest in ghosts and related things. Whatever information one gets at around seven years of age, virtually remains unchanged in quality, even at seventy, except for the addition of a few more ghost stories. What we actually know is: human beings die; some die of heart attacks, some die of accidents and so on. A few people are assassinated while others commit suicide. Of these, virtuous people who have accumulated a lot of merit-Punya-go directly to heaven as their souls are liberated from the bondage of the cycle of birth and death. The evil ones go to hell. But the souls of those who have neither enough merit to go to heaven nor enough discredit to go to hell and are still possessed by their unfulfilled desires keep hanging like 'Trishanku'. Such souls try to enter the bodies of

living individuals and through the agency of that individual try to satiate their unfulfilled desires. For example if a newly wed young woman suddenly dies, her soul is likely to become a ghost and possess a young healthy man.

There are different kinds of Ghosts and they are given different names. When a greedy Brahmin (priest) dies he becomes a Brahmasamandha. A greedy Brahmin (by caste) becomes a Brahmarakshas after his death. A woman becomes a Hadal if she dies during her delivery. Another type of ghost called Karnapishachya performs like a telephone. The 'residential colonies' of these ghosts are deserted and lonely places like the ramparts of old forts, streams, brooks and graveyards. Since these places, just like our towns and villages, are getting ever more overcrowded, poor ghosts are now forced to occupy Banyan or Peepul trees! Like human beings, they too have festivals on new moon and full moon days. A black magician will tell you how to entertain a ghost if you happen to come across one. It is to be offered things it likes, i.e., a sour lime, yellow rice, chicken with its feet pointing towards its tail, etc. In short it has to be treated like an invited and honored guest. The audience very well understands a talk of this sort and one can see it clearly on their faces. Then the listeners begin to respond and the dialogue proceeds thus:

If one utters 'Ram Ram', the ghost scurries away.

Ghosts do not have heads.

- Their eyes are located on their chests.

- They do not cast shadows.
- You can't see their reflections.
- The feet of ghosts are turned around.

Throughout Maharashtra I have experienced that no sooner you utter the words 'the feet of the ghosts' and take a little pause, then some one from the audience shouts, 'they are turned around.' Ask him 'who told you that?' Pat comes the reply, 'No one has to tell me that. We all know it.' The reason for the fact that we all know it without actually seeing a single ghost is that it is not the ghosts' feet but our heads that are turned around. These heads have to be set right. And that precisely is what the ANS means to do.

What is a ghost? We can conceive of two types of ghosts: one that is sham or a figment of the imagination and the other that results from mental illness. The sham ghost has four components:

- Pretense or deceit,
- Nurtured impressions (sanskar),
- Suggestion, and
- Sensory illusion.

One or more of these together generate a ghost. Let us consider them all one by one.

This is an incident that took place near Satara. It was the first day of the month. The night shift at the M.I.D.C. was over and the workers were returning to their village in groups. On their way they had to pass by a well in which a young girl had committed suicide just a fortnight ago. The workers were chitchatting and as they passed by this well, Vaman- one of the workers- stopped to answer nature's call. Soon they noticed that Vaman had not returned for a long time and stopped for him. They heard Vaman begging for

help and shouting that he won't be alive for long. They ran back to find that Vaman had fallen in the well. He was wet all over and shivering with cold. They pulled him out and inquired what had happened. He said, 'I finished my call and got up when someone caught hold of my collar so firmly, I could hardly turn back. What I saw was Pushpi!' Pushpi was the same newly married young girl who had committed suicide in that well. 'She was in white clothes from head to toe,' he continued, 'and one of her arms was fifteen feet long! She caught me by the collar with that hand, dragged me here and pushed me into the well.'

He talked haltingly and at times deliriously, 'I am possessed. I don't think she will ever let me go'. The workers reached him home. The next day the whole village was agog with the news that Pushpi had possessed Vaman. Continuous discussions on this issue ensued. Villagers started visiting Vaman and inquiring what happened. He kept relating the story with frequent delirious interruptions.

Sanjay Deshmukh, an activist of ANS, went to see him. Vaman told him the same story and added, 'you will not believe. But I was saved only by providence!' Sanjay kept probing him with searching questions. In response Vaman gave a detailed description of the woman; how she was white from top to toe, with white bangles, white earrings, white saree, blouse and slippers, why, even white hair! Sanjay paused for a couple of minutes and said, 'I do agree with all this, but I don't understand how such a young girl like Pushpi could have completely grey hair? She should have had dark hair! With

these words Sanjay returned home. All the people who saw Vaman after this were told the same old story but with one exception. The colour of Pushpi's hair turned black from white. When this happened, our activists literally caught Vaman by his collar and made him confess his sham.

Vaman was given to hard drinking. He had received his pay on that day. He was scared that all his creditors would visit him next morning and press for their money. To avoid them at least for a month, he invented this novel excuse of being possessed by

a ghost and having lost all his pay thereby. He, in fact had buried his pay packet under the tree and jumped into the well shouting for help. This he thought would help him postpone paying his creditors for a month and use the money for drinking! There was a bonus in addition. His relatives deeply sympathized with him, 'Never mind the pay but thank God, at least he came home safely.' This whole made-up drama is called a sham or pretence of a ghost. A number of such stories are well known and could be related by many. With exceptions, it usually turns out to be pretence!

Dr Narendra Dabholkar

## THE GREAT INDIAN WITCH - HUNT

Maina is a lovely 18-year old. She lives with her widowed mother Shanichari. Shy and innocent, she is the typical village belle who wants a good husband and beautiful children. The village drunkard Kallu – also the headman's son – has other ideas. He wants Maina for himself. Her mother refuses, slapping and insulting Kallu. In the next few days, a villager falls gravely ill and finally dies. The local *ojha* points a finger of suspicion at Shanicheri. The villagers take his word. Despite the mother – daughter's protests, Shanicheri is branded a witch and burnt alive in front of the whole village. Kallu now has Maina for himself.

This is the story of *Jeet*, a docu-drama. But Maina's story is repeated in villages across India. Women who try and defy

men are molested, raped and killed after being branded as witches. And the



villagers agree, even condone the practice of '*dakin pratha*' (witch tradition).

Sample this. In 2004, Sakhi Devi of Sonahatu village near Ranchi was returning home one evening when she



was suddenly attacked by a man from her village. He beat her mercilessly on her head, accusing her of practicing witchcraft, leaving the 60-year-old woman unconscious. It was only after the intervention of villagers that Sakhi was brought to a hospital where she lived to narrate her tale.

In 2005, Salge Oraon, a resident of Ranikunder village in east Singhbhum was hacked to death by villagers for being cause of illness. "Pay Rs 10,000 as fine." Salge was told. When she failed to comply she was beheaded before the family and burnt to destroy telltale evidence.

"I was shocked, when I found villagers thought nothing of brutally killing their kin without batting an eyelid. Even children are hardened to this reality and encourage witch-hunting," says Jeet director Lovlin Thadani.

The motive could be anything—a personal slight, refusing advances, reluctance to sell land or bearing girl children. A woman guilty of any of these 'charges' is likely to have her breasts chopped off, her teeth broken, limbs amputated, blinded and finally killed. "Since the cops, *ojha* and few powerful men in the village are hand-in-glove, the procedure is carried out with utmost precision. So much so that the villagers

#### ASSAM

Last year, 45-year-old Donsi Brahma of Udalguri in Bodoland Autonomous district was ostracised by the villagers before her own kin killed her. The villagers took her to be a witch and accused her of eating a one-year-old child after the death of his father. Her pleas fell on deaf years.

including the women are thankful that the evil spirit has been exorcised," says Thadani.

There are endless instances where women have been called witches, stripped, shaven and made to make rounds of the village and even eat and drink their urine and excreta. in many parts of Rajsthan, particularly

Dungarpur, Banswara, Udaipur, Tonk, Chittorgarh, Kota and Bhigwara. It has been seen that women are branded as witches. If not killed, such women often commit suicide. Witch-hunting is prevalent in the tribal heartland of central Gujarat, comprising Vadodara, Panchmahals and Dahod districts. Branded as dakin NGOs say about 100 cases are reported in these three districts every year. "Most of these cases go unrecorded or are registered under mental or physical harassment," says activist Kanu Brahmbhatt, who has worked extensively amongst tribals in Dahod.

Most villagers, even members of the victim's family, remain silent spectators. "We have to follow our tradition. We

#### GUJARAT

A tear sgo, Kesha, Rumali and Sangha were declared 'dakan' (witches) in Gamia village of Gujarat's Dahod district. They were tonsured and paraded around the village before they were forced to leave. They were branded witches after a 12-year-old boy in the village died and the disease could not be diagnosed. While nobody knows the real truth, the 'badva' or village witch doctor claimed the women were evil spirits in human form.

cannot go against what has been happening down the ages. Even those who realise that this is wrong seldom. Activists say cases abound especially in tribal-dominated belts. In a recent case, a tribal woman working with her husband in Surat was branded a witch after a relative of her husband fell ill in their native village of Bhatiwada in Dahod district. Her husband broke all ties with her and forced her to leave the village. She is now working as a labourer in Vadodara and stays alone.

In Andhra's Medak district, just a couple of weeks ago women branded as witches were tied to a pole in the middle of the village and beaten up. The police came to their rescue before anything fatal happened. The districts of Warangal, Ranga Reddy, Medak and Nizamabad are most notorious for witch hunting in AP.

The practice of witch-hunting in Assam continues to rear its ugly hand. At least 12 people were killed till Aug 2006 this year alone after being branded as witches. The practice is mostly prevalent

in the impoverished villages of Western Assam districts along the Indo-Burma border.

Incidents of witch-hunting are reported frequently in West Bengal. In the tea gardens in north Bengal, killing woman for allegedly practicing witchcraft is frequent. Janghrus and ojhas with their magic cures hold sway over the tea gardens labour community because of the miserable health of the garden labourers. In the past 13 years, more than 85 women have been killed for practicing 'witchcraft'.

Ironically though a prevention of Witch Practices Act was passed in undivided Bihar in 1999, a low literacy rate and an ailing public health structure has made the law almost meaningless. "There are dozens of remote villages in the state which are steeped in poverty and superstition – where villagers have never seen a school or even a doctor. How do you expect them to comprehend the law," asks Dayamani Balra, a social worker in Ranchi.

### JHARKHAND

Two women and a man of the same family were hacked to death by their neighbours earlier this year in a village in Ranchi district after they were charged with practicing witchcraft. According to unofficial records, at least 100 cases of witch hunting occur every year. However, according to official figures, only 200 cases have been registered since November 2000 when Jharkhand was created

### BENGAL

Recently, Tara Madri of Majlishpur village in south Dinajapur district was branded a witch by a local 'janaguru' (witch doctor) and blamed for the prolonged illness of another villager. He prescribed that the witch must be killed and her blood must be buried under earth of sick man to recover. Thankfully, while the villagers were assembling to put an end to Tara, the police got wind of their plan and rescued her.

against witchcraft and may consider enacting one for Gujarat after careful consideration. Unlike other states, people in Gujarat are less superstitious. Gujarat has no separate Act banning or preventing witchcraft. Says Gujarat law minister Ashok Bhatt. "We are in the process studying Maharashtra Act

Ever since poet-reformer Narmad campaigned against superstition, the movement against witchcraft has been strong in the state."

Interestingly a number of victims of witch-hunting have now taken up cudgels for spreading awareness about the ills of the practice. One such woman

is Vaidehi who is working silently in the

villages of Jharkhand making women aware of their rights. In Rajasthan, the groups for introducing an Act for Prevention of Witch Practices have been prepared. The state's women's commission has submitted a detailed Bill to the state government for introducing in the Vidhan Sabha.

Activist Ganesh Devy, who runs an academy in Tejgadh near Vadodara to educate tribal, feels that only a sweeping social reform can uproot this system. "Witch-hunting has its roots in gender injustice. One cannot expect the situation of these women to improve in a state where their ratio in the total population is declining," says Devy.

*Courtesy: Times of India*

## **COURT SUMMONS ASTROLOGER OVER "PREDICTION"**

An astrologer in Tamil Nadu has landed himself in trouble with a court summoning him to appear for allegedly predicting a long life for a dead man. A judicial magistrate court in Sirkazhi, 200 km from Madurai, summoned Savasamy of Vaitheeswarankovil, who practices Naadi Jotisham, on a cheating complaint by Gopalkrishnan. Under the method, predictions are based on ancient palm leave manuscripts, said to have been written by Tamil saint Agyasthiar. The manuscript with predictions for a particular person is located based on the thumb impression. Gopalkrishnan said he had recently approached Sivasamy, who runs a

centre at Vaitheeswarankovil, near Sirkazhi, home to Naadi astrology, and gave his thumb impression. The astrologer picked up a manuscript and read out the predictions. The predictions were also given in writing on payment of Rs 2000. But the predictions were false, he claimed. As a test case, he then gave the thumb impression of a person, who died in 2003, to the astrologer and paid fees. The astrologer gave in writing that the person, whose thumb impression was given, would have a long life. Seeking action against the astrologer, Gopalkrishnan in his complaint said he did not want another person to be cheated like him.

## SUPERSTITIONS KEEP GUJARAT MARKET CLOSED FOR 20 DAYS

Ahmedabad: Thanks to a four-generation-old superstition, traders at a busy bazaar in Gujarat's principal city downed their shutters for 20 days after Holi, incurring a loss of around Rs 5 crores. There is a strong belief among traders in Laat Bazar, which does wholesale business in grains and other such commodities, that whoever reopens his shop first after the Holi-break would lose someone in their family and go bankrupt.

"So great is the fear that 40 years ago, the market remained closed for as long as six months," Chunnilal, a caretaker at the market, told news agency.

"This year, the market remained closed till some prominent traders late on Friday consulted an astrologer who suggested an auspicious time for reopening of the market."

At 10 p.m, the traders performed a pooja at a temple in the vicinity of the market and all shops were symbolically reopened. Real trading commenced only on Monday.

Laat Bazar, in the heart of the walled city, came into existence some 90 years ago. Most of its traders are Marwaris. Its daily turnover is around Rs.3 million.

The market remains closed for a week every year during Holi. The festival of colours marks the beginning of a new year in many parts of India. Hence, after Holi, the traders reopen their shops according to astrological advice so that the following year is really "happy and prosperous" for them. said Madanji, a trader at the market:

"We are the fourth generation of traders here. Our forefathers came to this city and established business in this market. We began to believe in this superstition due to some incidents in the past.

"A few decades back, a temple of Lord Rama Pir was constructed in the vicinity of the market to ward off all evil spirits. After that, nothing bad has happened." Chunnilal ruefully added: "It is really disappointing that we believe in such superstitions in the 21st century."

The spread of atheistic outlook is the hope of humanity to turn from war to peace, from slavery to freedom, from superstition to sense of reality, from conflict to cooperation.

**Gora**

**THE DETAILED PROGRAM OF  
FEDERATION OF RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (FERA) CONFERENCE  
TO BE HELD AT  
BJS COLLEGE, VAGHOLI, PUNE**

**Friday 27 April 2007**

Registration

**10.00 am to 10.30 am**

**INAUGURAL FUNCTION :**

**10.30 am to 12.15 pm**

Welcome Song : **BJS & ANS**

Introductory Speech

**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**

Chairman, ANS, Maharashtra

Welcome Speech

**Mr. Shantilalji Muttha**

National President, BJS, Pune

Theme of the conference

**Dr. Narendra Nayak**

President, FIRA

Release of English translation of

**Lokayat**

- **Sadashiv Athawale**

Chief Guest's Address

**Dr. G. Vijayam**

Executive Director,  
Atheist Centre, Vijaywada

Presidential speech

**Mr. N. D. Patil** President, ANS

Vote of thanks

**Dr. Rajendra Kankariya**

Principal, BJS College,  
President MANS, PC

**SESSION - I**

**12.30 pm to 1.30 pm**

**Scientific Temperament**

**Dr. Jayant Naralikar,**

Eminent Scientist, India.

**FIRA Reports & Accounts :**

**2.30 pm to 3.00 pm**

**SESSION -II**

**3.00 pm to 6.00 pm**

FIRA's member association presentation : Each association will read out, within 15 minutes, activities carried out in past, what it is doing at present and plans in future for promotion of rationalism

**SESSION - III**

**6.00 pm to 7.00 pm**

Interview of **Mahesh Bhagwat**

(SP, CID, Hyderabad)

for his work against **Buvabaji**

**SESSION - IV**

**7.00 pm to 8.00 pm**

Miracle exposure performance competition : Each Participant will be given 5 minutes to perform miracle

**SESSION - V :**

**9.00 pm to 10.00 pm**

Film show



Saturday 28 April 2007

**SESSION - V**

**9.30 am to 11.15 am**

**Role of Media, Government & Education in Promotion of Rationalism**

**Mr. Madhavrao Godbole**

former home secretary of India

**Mr. Anand Agashe**

Senior journalist of daily Sakal

**Mr. Sameeran Valvekar**

Director, EMRC, University of Pune

**Dr. D. D. Bandishte**

Ex-Professor of Philosophy, Indore (MP)

**SESSION -VI**

**11.30 am to 12.30 pm**

**Secularism :**

**Dr. K. Veermani**

President, Dravid Kazhagam Tamilnadu

**Mr. Yashwant Sumant**

Professor, Dept of Politics, University of Pune

**SESSION -VII**

**12.30 pm to 1.30 pm**

Modern Spiritual Godmen :

**B. Premanand**

Founder of FIRA

**Dr. B. A. Parikh**

former VC of South Gujarat University

**Dr. Narendra Nayak** President FIRA

Lunch break :1.30 pm to 2.30 pm

**Session - VIII**

**2.30 pm to 3.30 pm**

**Antisuperstition Act of Maharashtra**

**Mr. B. G. Kolse Patil**

Retd. Justice of High Court of Mumbai

**Session - IX**

**3.45 pm to 4.45 pm**

**Separation of Religion from Politics**

**Mr. U. Kalanathan**

National Secretary, FIRA

**VALEDICTORY FUNCTION :**

**4.45 pm to 6.15 pm**

Narration

**Dr. Rajendra Kankariya**

Welcome Speech

**Mr. P. C. Nahar**

President, BJS, Executive Council,

Presidential Address

**Dr. Narendra Nayak** President, FIRA

Chief Guest's Address

**Dr. Shriram Lagoo**

Senior rationalist & eminent cine-artist

**Dr. Narendra Jadhav**

Vice Chancellor, University of Pune

Vote of Thanks

**U Kalanathan**

National Secretary, FIRA

# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build



Rationalist Society

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## Correspondence

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## SCIENTIFIC LITERACY

*For us scientific literacy constitutes the knowledge you need to understand public issues. It is a mix of facts, vocabulary, concepts, history and philosophy. It is not the specialized stuff of the experts, but the more general, less precise knowledge used in the political discourse. If you can understand the news of the day as it relates to science, if you can take articles with headlines about genetic engineering and the ozone hole and put them in a meaningful context in short, if you can treat news about the same way that you treat everything else that comes over your horizon, then as far as we are concerned you are scientifically literate.*

Robert M. Hazen & James Trefil

## Editorial Board:

Prabhakar Nanawaty  
Ms Suman Oak  
T B Khilare

## STING OPERATION OF SHIVANAND MAHARAJ

Umbraj is a small village on National Highway no 4, 45 km from Satara. On the way between Patan and Umbraj there is a small Urul Valley. One may find natural caves formed due to rain for thousands of years in this valley. A natural formation of Lord Shiva's icon, 'Pindi', can be seen in caves. Some one might have carved eyes and mouth using lime or chalk. That itself is sufficient to term it as deity. However this type of cave served as Headquarter for all shady deeds of Shivanand Maharaj and his gang who flourished within a span of short time by cheating gullible public.

As a matter of fact, Shivanand hails from Devar Hipparagi a village in north Karnataka. His full name is Shivanand Ravutappa Zode (Patil). He is a married person. Due to some family conflicts he ran away from his native village and came to Nikamwadi near Wai. He started a tailoring shop. Though he discontinued his studies after fourth standard, he was quite communicative, smart and has quick wit to make a fast buck. Basically he was happy go lucky man, hated doing any honest work but enjoyed food and drinks. He was just interested in money and can go to any extent to have it. In that pursuit, he left Nikamwadi and settled at Umbraj. He opened a small vegetable shop. He befriended with prominent villagers and mesmerized with his sweet talk and money plans. As a side-business he started practicing spiritualism.

He knew that unless he performs miracles no one will notice him. He also knew that there is no money unless he becomes famous. By chance he found the cave in Urul valley and found the Lord Shiva's Pindi. The cave was almost deserted and was hidden deep in the jungle. This ambience suited him and his gang to hatch a plan of money spinning. The gang built a tin shed outside the cave.

He chose the auspicious day of Mahashivaratri for his operation. Shivanand announced that he will take penance by standing on nail shoes for 82 days continuously without speaking a word and without taking any food or water and praying the Lord Shiva. He started wearing saffron dress and grew his beard. He was a stark imitation of any meditating Yogi from Himalaya. This announcement and garb, no doubt, attracted the crowd and made them to visit the place. His gang members made all the arrangements for the disciples thronging to seek blessings of Maharaj during his penance days. They built a huge pendal to accommodate the crowd and started 'yadnya' on the open ground. The gang started charging Rs 51 each for the prasad (blessed food) which is nothing but cooked rice and curry. People started rushing to valley. Tonnes and tonnes of rice were cooked for distribution. Money started pouring. Obviously local politicians also joined the gang and started sharing the loot. However the politicians gave the sanctity to whole affair, which enhanced the confidence of the gang. They started forcing the people travelling in the vehicles to seek blessings of Maharaj by paying the fees. This irritated people who started complaining to the local authorities. Local newspapers carried the storied of Maharaj. Though Umbraj police smelled rat but they could not intervene unless the written complaint is made. No one was coming forward to do so. ANS unit of Satara started receiving complaints about the blind faith and miraculous appearance of Maharaj and stop this nonsense. But surprisingly no one wanted to get involved by giving written complaint.

In absence of any written complaint, the activists of Satara unit, viz; Prashant Potdar and Bhagavan Ranadive, planned a visit to cave and expose Maharaj. They had

hidden tape in their pocket. They dressed like any other villagers to hide their urban identity. Prashant requested Maharaj "I am suffering from giddiness for last so many years while working on computer. None of the doctors were able to cure me. I came to know your therapeutic touch. Please do something to get rid of this painful disease." Prashant bowed his head. Maharaj offered his blessing by making some sort of hand sign. Prashant could not make head or tail of the sign. Suddenly from nowhere, Maharaj's gang mate appeared and explained the meaning of the sign. Maharaj wants Prashant to throw a coconut in the running water; perhaps giddiness felt by Prashant will vanish along with the coconut. Bhagavan Ranadive narrated another story telling Maharaj that his wife ran away from his house after some minor incident and deserted the poor man. Maharaj gave a smile and told him also to throw a coconut in the running water. While returning to Satara they found that tape did not record anything. They were quite disappointed. Meanwhile they saw Ashok Nikam, the gang mate of Maharaj. He gave full and colourful account of his Guru which was promptly taped by the activists.

One fine morning Dr Dabholkar and activists approached Prakash Mutyal, SP, Satara. He responded to the request and ordered Umbraj police superintendent to take appropriate action after written complaint from Prakash Potdar. Meanwhile ANS activists planned the sting operation to expose Maharaj with the assistance of Sahara TV. Sujit Ambekar and Sushil Kshirasagar took interest in ANS activities and they agreed to do the needful. ANS activists and TV crew reached the valley early in the morning. Surprisingly Maharaj was sitting in a swing enjoying the morning breeze instead of standing on nail shoes. Sujit started interviewing Maharaj. After seeing the TV camera Maharaj was very happy. "Don't you get any pain after standing on the nail shoes?" Maharaj immediately stood on the shoes and

practically started dancing like Baba Ramdev. However he missed a step and a sharp nail pierced in his foot giving him pain. Every one sympathized with him. The camera was recording all these events. In fact his feet was bleeding. He even showed the injured feet to camera. However he was visibly disappointed since he failed in performing the miracle. He started weeping in public. The crew also took video recording of this miracle.

TV crew and ANS activists started praising Maharaj and forced him to break the oath of silence. "As a matter of fact I do not wish to break my oath till 82<sup>nd</sup> day. But I can't displease my disciples. As such I am breaking my oath of silence on 62<sup>nd</sup> day itself". Thus Maharaj then spoke continuously for 20 minutes non-stop about his miracles.

"I cured a lame girl from a near by village. She was not able to walk for three years. But after visiting me within ten minutes she started walking and gone to her village by foot."

"In another instance, my disciples pressed to produce milk from the empty vessel like this. I instantly produced cow's milk and offered everyone present there."

"Once this whole valley was on fire I extinguished the spreading of fire just by waving this hand. You may find the burn mark even now."

"I cured the drinking habit of a drunkard who visited me in a drunken state".

Thus his list was extending.

"What are your next plans?"

"I would like to visit Vaishnodevi temple in Kashmir. I want to convert this Urul valley into Kashmir valley"

On the way back, TV crew interviewed Raju Shinde, a disciple who was duped by Maharaj, explained how he was cheated and the misdeeds of Maharaj. The same evening Sujit Ambekar, Sushil Kshirasagar, Prashant Potdar and Bhagavan Ranadive contacted Umbraj Police Inspector, Sampatrao Patil. He took prompt action and arrested Maharaj and

brought to Taluka place for further action. He was sentenced 15 days police custody. Maharaj gave in writing that he will never repeat such performance in future. He also confessed that he used to take food secretly on these days though he announced that he is on fast for 82 days.

Standing on the nail shoes is not a miracle at all. His 60 kg weight is equally distributed on 460 nails, which, comes about 130 gm

per nail which is not sufficient to pierce through his foot. If he would have stood on only 2 nails instead of 460 nails, the nails would have made sufficient damage to his feet.

ANS activists thanked Sahara TV for their cooperation in exposing Shivanand. If media joins hands with ANS activists a lot can be done!

Kumar Mandape

## MANUFACTURING OF SAINTS: MOTHER THERESA

Remember Bhopal tragedy in India? (Dec 3, 1984). 3,800 workers died in their sleep due to leakage of Methyl Isocyanides gas from Union Carbide plant. This happened early morning. It was a shock to the civilized world. At that juncture Mother Theresa flew from Kolkata to Bhopal. Has she come to console the families of the victims? No. Mother Theresa came to request that the management of Union Carbides at Bhopal may be forgiven! That is Mother Theresa.

### Money Making Charity

At the time of her death, Susan Shields revealed that \$50 million were in the New York Bank. Susan worked with Mother Theresa for nine years and dealt with donations and cheques. The money, which was supposed to be spent on poor kids in charity homes, remained in the banks. Why? Mother Theresa received enormous amounts from various sources. She never observed ethics in receiving funds.

Robert Maxwell, the mega publisher who embezzled the employees' funds to the tune of 450 million pounds, liberally donated \$1.25 million to Mother Theresa. She knew the facts about Robert Maxwell. The dictator of Haiti honoured Mother Theresa. She flew all the way from Kolkata to Haiti to receive the honours from Jean Claude Duvalier family who tortured people.

Mother Theresa praised him as lover of poor people!

Mother Theresa received \$1.25 million from Charles Keating in USA. He floated a company called Keating Savings and Loans during 1980 and cheated the public to the tune of \$250 millions. He was jailed. During the trial Mother Theresa appealed to the judge for pardon. The attorney asked Mother Theresa to return the money she received from Keating so that it can be distributed to the victims and at least some families could be saved. She kept quiet.

Mother Theresa visited Albanian dictator, Enver Hoxha's grave for reasons not known. Mother Theresa praised Indira Gandhi for her emergency rule (1975-77), saying that the people are happy and employment problem was solved. She Received Bharat Ratna!

Dr Robin Fox, the editor of Lancet, the prestigious medical magazine from UK, visited the charity institutes of Mother Theresa in Kolkata in 1991 to find that there were no sterilised syringes and not even analgesic medicines for suffering children. When inquired, the Mother replied that children could be cured with prayers.

During Bangla Desh War, 4 50 000 women flew and some were raped. Mother Theresa opposed termination of pregnancies in the name divine grace. Walter Wuellenweber did some research on the funds of Mother Theresa and published



articles in Stern Magazine in Germany during 1998. Germany alone accounted for \$3 million annually for Mother Theresa charity account. All the accounts and spending were kept secret.

The money collected for charity houses in India was never accounted for. Where did the money go? The sources say that ultimately it reached the bank of Rome, which is controlled by Vatican. Sister Pauline in Germany refused to answer about the money of Mother Theresa charities. Dhiru Shah in India has written the motives of Mother Theresa as conversion of religion. Arup Chatterjee published scathing criticism with first hand experiences in his book, *The Final Verdict* in 2003. Similarly Sunanda Datta Ray, noted journalist, also written articles on the behaviour of Mother Theresa. Christopher Hitchens, the international reputed journalist produced a documentary on Mother Theresa in collaboration with Tariq Ali, entitled *Hell's Angel* which was telecasted on channel 4 in UK (1994 Nov).

Then Christopher Hitchens published the book on Mother Theresa. Before doing so, he visited Kolkata charity houses of Mother Theresa, interviewed her and noted the facts. That book is eye opener to all sane persons. Catholics are powerful community in the world. Pope controls them. With the support of Pope, Mother Theresa continued her charity activities. She received several laurels and prizes including Templeton Prize in 1973, Noble Prize and became honorary citizen of US in 1996.

Mother Theresa (1910-1997) is neither Mother nor Theresa. Her original name is Agnes Gonxhe Bojaxhiu. She was born in Uskub, a town in Macedonia. She joined the sisters of lore to at the age of fifteen and went to Ireland. Then she came to India where she worked as teacher for sometime and later started charity home for children. Catholic nuns are not supposed to marry. They are called Mothers when they become seniors. Just as Hindu Sanyasis

change their original name after becoming hermits, so also Catholics adopt new name.

### **Making Saint**

Whenever Mother Theresa was sick she was admitted in corporate hospitals and got excellent treatment. In 1993 Mother Theresa had first heart stroke and when she had second heart stroke in 1989 a pacemaker was arranged. She suffered with pneumonia in 1991 and broke her collar bone in 1997 and also suffered with malaria. She underwent heart surgery once again. She was admitted in corporate hospitals and given excellent treatment. That should be welcomed. Mother Theresa ought to have given similar value to the lives of destitute children whom she recruited and in whose name she accumulated enormous funds. Instead of praying and saving money, she ought to have given the children best medical treatment in good hospitals. She did not do that. She eschewed strong pain killers. When a patient was dying with cancer, she said: "you are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you". The agonising patient said: "Please tell Jesus to stop kissing me"! After her death Pope Paul John XI wished to make her saint urgently. He waived the waiting period of five years. To fulfil the minimum conditions, they concocted some miracles and myths.

### **Monica Besra's Miracle Story**

A tribal poor lady in West Bengal was suffering with stomach tumor and tuberculosis. Dr Ranjan Mustaff of Belurghat General Hospital in West Bengal treated her. The acute TB cyst in stomach has gone with the medical treatment. Mr Seiko, husband of Monica Besra also confessed in the beginning about the treatment and cure. They were poor and have five children. They were approached by the Catholic nuns, offered free education for their children and also donated some land for them. Then they brain washed Monica Besra to narrate the miracle story.

One-day Monica Besra saw the photo of Mother Theresa in locket and miraculously the cyst in stomach has disappeared. The records in hospital disappeared when a charity mission worker visited the hospital. (Time, Asia mentioned this) that was the miracle? They propagated it to support sainthood for Mother Theresa. The first part of sainthood is called beatification, which

was done on 19 Oct 2003. The tradition of Catholics is to create saints now and then so that they perpetuate the belief system among the Catholics and also get income through some events. This practice was going on since centuries and Pope John Paul XI continued that practice. It is income generating way for Vatican.

Dr. Innaih Narisetti

## D. D. KOSAMBI'S WORLD VIEW

D D Kosambi's mind was versatile. Though a scientist and mathematician by profession, he took an interest in history, and brought to its methodology an original approach. Kosambi was a Marxist by conviction, and his definition of science has Hegelian echoes--"Science is the cognition of necessity."

Science had a continuity that other subjects lacked. He often said, "I stood on other people's shoulders, still others will stand on mine." The job of science, he wrote, was to make "better and better approximations to the truth", but for science to make an advance, the scientist needed freedom, yet he found himself surrounded by restrictions on what to think and what to say. For instance, Galileo's astronomy was thought dangerous, because Galileo by stating factually what he saw, challenged the prevalent theory of the ruling class and its right arm, the Church, so that "....by implication the rest of the social system was also laid open to challenge, something no man is free to do without risk," then or now. Kosambi spoke from personal experience. He knew the fetters Big Business could and did place on a scientist with an inquiring mind, questioning all matters.

Science flourished when the scientist carried on his investigations unhampered, which was the case during political upheaval, when a new class gained power. Along with the rising class came a bumper crop of scientists: Newton, for example,

whose discoveries coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie in England.

Famous French scientists sprung up after the French Revolution smashed the feudal system. The bourgeoisie needed and encouraged scientific discoveries. But to Kosambi there was no justification to tie science to the apron strings of a decaying class just because that class in its prime 400 odd years ago had brought into existence science as we know it today. The world and the bourgeoisie have changed since then and the scientist needs to be free of that class, for, "....if he serves that class which grows food scientifically and then dumps it into the ocean, while millions starve all over the world, if he believes the world is over-populated and the atom bomb is a blessing that will perpetuate his own comfort, he is moving in a retrograde orbit on a level no beast could achieve."

Though not prone to imagine virtues in the bourgeoisie, Kosambi gave that class full credit for being the harbinger of modern science. But the bourgeoisie per se is not essential to scientific growth and the reason why the scientist in today's capitalist society feels choked is that the class he serves fears the change it sees in a different social structure which has managed to survive and to thrive without a bourgeoisie. This difference cannot be freely discussed by scientists in the 'Free World' he noticed. For if they did, they risked losing their jobs. Studying a different social structure,

inquiring into and questioning the social need for the bourgeoisie, or for classes today, are topics debarred from scientific inquiry.

After World War II, scientists grew worried about their dwindling freedom, which Kosambi found out, meant pursuing their work in their chosen field, and being paid for it by Big Business, war departments, or universities whose funds depended chiefly on these two sources. So scientists were "under the necessity of producing regular output of patentable or advertising value while avoiding all dangerous philosophical or social thought."

Kosambi laid bare the class basis of science and called it "the theology of the bourgeoisie". In the days of handicraft production, before machines came in, technical knowledge was passed on slowly and production limited. And when the indebted craftsman mortgaged his tools, they brought no profit to the usurer though the craftsman starved. So there came into being a new class whose labor could be exploited. The usurer became the capitalist and the craftsman formed the proletariat. This necessitated fresh thinking to fit in a managing class which doesn't handle the tools of production. Here Science came into its own, and Galileo's study of pumps, for instance, resulted both in hydrostatics and more efficient pumps, because, "Science is nothing if it does not work in practice. In Science, practice and theory cannot be divorced." Kosambi often stressed that science was not the result of talented people thinking up scientific problems in their minds. Only when there was the social need, did the necessary invention come up. Dialectical materialism was the method Kosambi followed in his study of ancient Indian history in which source material is meager and chronology, extremely difficult to fix. Kosambi's basic method of tackling chronology was by demarcating periods in history according to the means of production, not by battles or changes in dynasty. But here too, Kosambi recognized

that in an undeveloped society, socio-economic forces guiding historical development, major wars, major changes in rulers, major religious upheavals, all revealed the fundamental changes in productive relations. Kosambi regarded these as basic, while they had been ignored by earlier bourgeois scholars. In addition, India had an uneven course of development, what with the size of the country, the different languages and differing natural environments, so that even if some ancient document did reveal the mode of production and so the level of development of that society, it would be a job to fix its chronology. Unlike Brahmin records, Kosambi found Jain records more dependable. The Jains had a large number of traders to whom years and dates meant something, and they had to get their records straight.

Another difficulty faced by any student of ancient Indian history, was the terms used. Terms can be, and have changed their meaning, and Kosambi noted that this was more so in India where the priestly control over Sanskrit led to secrecy, to memorizing, and consequently, to ambiguity. Kosambi suggested that a scientific Indian chronology would be possible only by the method of citation. Researching into the earliest mention of customs, techniques, and foodstuffs was one of his methods. "Digging in the right places" could help evaluate written sources, such as the Mahabharata War or Rama's invasion of Lanka.

Slavery in India was another disputed issue to which Kosambi tried to find an answer by relating it to the method of production. Greeks and Romans, accustomed to slaves, couldn't recognize any class that looked like their own slaves. Besides, neither in inscriptions nor in literature is there any mention of slaves taken in battle, slave marts or caravans of slave traders. Kosambi concluded that *dasa* or *sudra* were alternate terms describing the same thing. The caste system

according to Kosambi prevented slavery in India in the Greco-Roman sense. The Aryans destroyed the earlier Indus Valley civilization, with an urban population comparable to the early Sumerian. The urban population must have been kept going by a large, surplus-producing agrarian population, who became the *dasas*. The Rigveda mentions two *varnas*, as caste was then known--the *Arya* and the *Dasa*. Later on *Dasas* acquired the meaning of *Sudra* and the *Sudra* served the three upper castes. The other ground on which Kosambi refutes the possibility of classical slavery in ancient India is that at the time of the Aryan invasion, the Aryans had no private, only tribal property, and the *Sudras* were the slaves of the entire tribe.

In the course of his study of ancient Indian history, Kosambi found tribal people whose lives, because of the availability of food, had remained basically unchanged when too much deforestation hadn't ruined their traditional food and living habits. With plough agriculture began the mutual acculturation of food gatherers and farmers, who, in time, found their place in the caste system, and the food gatherers contributed their two main don'ts -- not accepting food from a stranger and no marriage outside the tribe -- to the caste system. Kosambi also traced the tribal origins of many Hindu deities. One of the tribes he studied was the *Ras Phad Pardhis*, nomads of the Deccan.

Field work played an important part in Kosambi's study of history. He came by evidences of mutual acculturation first hand. He went over to the farmers, unmindful of heat, dust, or their unhygienic conditions. More important, he crossed the barriers formed by generations of poverty on the one hand and exploitation on the other. "Such field work," he wrote, "has to be performed with critical insight, taking nothing for granted or on faith, but without the attitude of superiority, sentimental reformism or spurious leadership."

Dialectical materialism found its way into Kosambi's views on literature. He felt

that arrangement of words alone did not make an author great and that Shakespeare's greatness was due to his expressing a new class basis. In those days, the bourgeoisie was the rising class, and their interests coincided with those of the oppressed. To be great, Kosambi held, a poet had to show up some part of the social structure and the seeds of its negation, which happened during the emergent stage of a new class. With his scientific mind always on the lookout for suspicious coincidences from which to draw general truths, he felt: that was why the greatest names in literature come at the emergent and not the decadent period of a particular class, and why literature, fulfilling these requirements outlasts the society it reflected.

But after socialist revolution, somehow, the literature in the socialist country lacks both the power and the literary forms which arose during earlier social upheavals. Kosambi, with his critical admiration for socialist achievements explained: that was because the new class in earlier societies emerged while the old class was dominant. The new class turned to literature to express its hopes and aspirations because any political expression was denied it. But when in a socialist society, the working class gains power, it gains political expression. The struggle has always been bitter, and the new, socialist country tries to reach the advanced level of the older capitalist countries, which have probably tried to kill its socialist revolution. On the literary front, writers face another difficulty, in that they have spent their formative years in the old society. Classless society did not exist as far as one can remember; and the literary production takes on what Kosambi called the 'boy-loves-tractor' pattern. Party directives and writers' conference resolutions cannot remedy the situation. The cure, as Kosambi saw it, was to abolish illiteracy and make classical works in that language easily available. In addition, he felt that some way had to be found to link

the aesthetics of the new socialist society to production, and then new art forms would develop, as music did, originally, to make the crops grow, and dance, drama, painting and sculpture originated in primitive initiation rites and sym- pathetic magic.

But these developments, however beneficial to mankind, need one pre-requisite, peace. The argument that war requirements allotted vast funds for research and scientific development, was, he felt, "vicious." He wrote, "Quite apart from the destructive- ness of total war, the crooked logic of Big Business and war-mongers is fatal to the clear thinking needed for Science." Kosambi felt that lasting peace had to be based on "true democracy", where all men were truly equal and no one could claim any superiority by virtue of any right whatsoever, whether divine, of birth, conquest or that of private property. Otherwise peace, as imperialists have seen it over the centuries, would have no meaning. Kosambi often quoted Tacitus on the subject, who had written, "He made a desert and called it peace," referring to a contemporary Roman Emperor. To Kosambi, it was "twisted logic" that waged war in the name of peace, and "which bombs people indiscriminately to save them from Communism."

Being an active fighter for peace, Kosambi went into the causes that prevent peace, and saw in food a powerful weapon in the war against mankind, excepting that fraction of the people to whom food is a very minor item of expenditure. "In a word it is class war, and all other wars of today stem from attempts to turn it outward. Even the Romans knew that the safest way to avoid inner conflict and to quiet the demands of their own citizens was to attempt new conquests." World War III, Kosambi felt, was not inevitable, and that public opinion, once aroused, could stop it; and he spared no effort in mobilizing that public opinion. He also felt that colonial liberation would help the cause of world peace, being one step towards making "have-not" countries a thing of the past.

Kosambi's approach to life was based on his Marxism -- but not its blind, uncritical application. "Marxism cannot be reduced to a rigid formalism like mathematics, nor can it be treated as a standard technique such as an automatic lathe."

The way to cherish Kosambi's memory is to acquire a mastery over his methods.

Kusum Madgavkar

*(Niece of Prof. Kosambi and knew him from childhood)*

## SIN AND SCIENCE

Every person who has reached social maturity in a modern city can say that the meaning of crime, sin, and science is self-evident. Most of us, in India at least, know that sin depends upon the particular religion professed; drinking wine is a sin for a Muslim, beef eating for a Hindu, while the Christian does both without a qualm. This variable concept of sin being no longer sufficient to regulate society, legal sanctions are applied to forbid certain

actions which are labelled as crimes, to be punished by police and court action. A crime must be detected and the offender put through some legal formalities before punishment becomes effective; retribution for sin can hardly be proved in most cases, hence is usually relegated to the next world or the next rebirth. For science, the consequences rest upon logical materialist interpretation of careful experiments or observations, independently of theological



or juridical regulations. He who swallows a certain dose of poison must die whether the action is legal or not; allowing the proper number of bacteria to lodge in your system develops corresponding disease - whether God wills it or not - with a definite statistical frequency.

If now all three of these approaches tell us the same thing, if the commission of sin should lead to a strong possibility of disease while being also a crime, society then seems to be doing its best to stamp out a dangerous evil. This is certainly the case in the regulation of sex relations, with its concomitants: divorce, venereal disease, prostitution; similarly for drunkenness and its effects upon the individual, upon his family, and upon society as a whole through increase of accidents in a machine age.

Dyson Carter reports fairly and dispassionately upon the methods used quite recently to stamp out these evils in two entirely different contemporary civilizations, each a leading model of its own type. In the USA no one can deny the powerful development of science, with an even more powerful development of the police force; all American religious groups combine their efforts upon such questions. Nevertheless, the divorce rate is increasing, and is about the highest in the world; venereal disease, prostitution, alcoholism remain ineradicable spite of 'reform' political campaigns, special police drives, and constant exhortations from the pulpit. In the USSR the first and greatest representative of a new form of society, there was every reason for these deadly by-products of modern society to have hared up. Organized religion was smashed by the revolution, most former restraints removed, the prostitute no longer punished as a criminal, divorce made almost effortless, and cheap liquor provided by the Government. Add to this the misery of wars of intervention following the revolution and the constantly increasing rate of production; then, bourgeois logic would lead you to expect a continuous debauch. Yet, we find

that prostitution has disappeared altogether, the divorce rate forced down to a negligible level, drunkenness now almost unknown in a country once notorious for its besotted muzhiks and workers

These results, which might seem paradoxical and even fantastic, were obtained simply by turning scientific inquiry upon the sorts of the problem, following its conclusions to their logical end. What the policeman dare not, priest cannot, scientist does not ask in capitalistic countries is why the social evils exist at all. The Soviet answer is that they exist because certain classes of people make heavy profits thereby. The exploitation of vice is a simple consequence of that general exploitation of the vast mass of people, which necessarily drives a considerable number to vice. Removal of the general exploitation took away the prime cause, and ruthless punishment was served out to those who tried to make profit, not to their victims: to the brothel keeper, not the prostitute; to the bootlegger, not the drunkard. At the same time, the right to employment became part of the way of life, a decent livelihood being made possible for all. Then it was easy to observe the effects of the new freedom, to turn on legislation, party propaganda; scientific education of the people. Alternative forms of amusement and relaxation had been provided for all with full literacy and cheap as well as good reading matter, fine music, excellent cinema, parks of culture, sport. The former evils disappeared simply because they no longer had any reason to exist. Life became so well worth living for the first time that escape from it was no longer necessary.

We face the same problems in India and are now trying the American system, including prohibition. However, any profiteer is free to shorten the lives of his countrymen by denying them the essentials of life and he does this as member of a highly respected class. The police protect him and his gains against the victims. The scientist ignores the effects of starvation,

filthy lodging, lack of education upon those who made the profit possible, and rushes to help the capitalist with technical advice, medical aid, or even gratuitous praise; for who but the rich can pay well, who but those who have made heavy profits endow research? As for religion, it merely proclaims that the oppressed will get their due in some other life or still more comfortingly that they must have

misbehaved in a previous birth to suffer so now; that is, they may be ignored altogether or squeezed even more painfully. The reformer, with the best of intentions, attempts to gain the benefits of a revolution without the revolution itself.

DD Kosambi

## REASON IS THE REASON!

Reason is the reason? Let me explain how.

All know that reason means talent, intellect or even genius; and reason means cause. Although we know that reason and effect are indivisibly connected, it is sometimes experienced that we do not know the effect of a known reason and on other times we do not know the reason of a known effect. What does away with this hiatus between two? It is Reason, which does this great job.

The reason of this great 'Reason' remaining constantly worried is the verbose, unceasing outpour of the Faithists who deliver nothing but 'myths' as against 'Reasons' and truths! Faithists are about 90% in all societies all over the world only because they fall a prey to lending credence to anything they read/hear just because its source is so called sacred books or holy persons. And why does this happen? Only because a very large amount of capital moves around faith as against none around the Reason! The capital holders have a sway over not only religionists and spiritualists but also on political heads obviously because their vested interests are safe by following such policy! Reason will triumph only when this un-ideal situation undergoes a revolution. Faith becomes their God just because he serves their mundane interests, Faith looks at non-mundane interests though!

Reason provides man a real reason for his salvation (though not with spiritual sense!); but to understand this, the untruth of faith's salvation must be understood well. Someone said about mind, "Mind is the slayer of truth; let us stay slayer!" Taking a cue from this should Reasonists slay Faithists because they too slay the Truth? Not at all! Killing is very common to Faithists the world over. There is not a single instance of Reasonists who have done so. Violence is a taboo for them. Persuasion has been their way and MUST remain in days to come also.

Reason is the reason of ALL GOOD of Man; yet faith subordinates 'Reason' and installs GOD in place of GOOD! Reasonists have reason to withstand this onslaught; and they doubtless will! Reason bestows on man good reasoning as against faith that deprives man of reasoning. Therefore I will emphatically say: Reason MUST triumph instead of Reason may triumph! My only worry is: whether I will see this happen before I take my last breath, since I am eighty four year old.

Y.J Mahabal

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## TRADITION, SCIENCE & SOCIETY

Every society has its own tradition and culture. These are largely based on the beliefs and the understanding of the law of nature by the people at any particular period of time. For primitive man, sunrise, sunset and many other natural phenomena were very mysterious. The solar eclipse, which created darkness at noon instilled fear in the minds of the primitive people. Based on the understanding, or rather misunderstanding, they formulated their own beliefs and value systems. During those days, there was no science worth mentioning.

But with the progress of time, man began looking around him with curiosity and tried to understand natural phenomena. Obviously, questioning was totally absent among the people in the primitive society. When man began acquiring the valuable traits of curiosity and questioning, modern science had its beginning. All of us know that science and technology have made tremendous progress especially in last two centuries. Many phenomena, which were considered to be mysterious, have been elegantly explained by science.

Just as any other society, our society also formulated its own beliefs, traditions and culture. Ours is one of the most ancient civilizations. Our ancient people had very fertile imagination. Besides, they had their own vested interests. They were the architects of many unscientific theories and practices, which have been damaging the interests of our society. For example, the caste system, which has been in existence for thousands of years is most inhuman and blatantly socially unjust. It has been doing incalculable harm to the progress of the society. It is a part of Hindu culture. No other society has such a meaningless system. In spite of advances in science and technology, caste system continues to persist.

Similarly many unscientific beliefs

and superstitions continue to hold sway over vast sections of the society. Astrology is omnipotent. Godmen are growing in strength day by day. Religious fanaticism, fundamentalism and obscurantism have been doing irreparable damage to the unity and integrity of our society. We claim to have science and technology of the twentieth century going on to twenty-first. But in many respects, we continue to possess primitive thinking.

We have a tendency to claim that we knew modern science and technology, stated in our scriptures, thousands of years ago. And Vedas have been repository of all modern scientific information. This is absolutely baseless. When protagonists of this school of thought claim that we had even aeroplanes centuries ago, I have been requesting such people to show evidence in any ancient text such as Vedas regarding at least such simple things as the composition of water or atmosphere. There is no mention of hydrogen, Oxygen, Nitrogen or Carbon dioxide or their equivalents in any of these scriptures. Without knowing such elementary scientific facts, it is absolutely impossible to make any significant progress in science. But vested interests continue to make such tall claims and vast sections of gullible people continue to repose faith in such matters.

It is a matter of deep regret that vested interests try to defend all kinds of irrational beliefs and traditions by cleverly giving some kind of "scientific touch". But when many such blind beliefs and traditions are tested on the anvil of experiment by using well established scientific methods, their hollowness will be exposed.

Unfortunately, Science has become only a means of livelihood for many. It should become a way of life. The scientific method that is employed in laboratories and science teaching should be used in all fields, especially in the field of religion. Only then there is some chance of getting rid of

meaningless traditions and blind beliefs. In fact, one of the fundamental duties of citizens according to the Indian constitution is development of scientific temper, spirit of inquiry, humanism and reform. For the effective implementation of this all important

warning for those who dare examine it. If you try to

Fundamental Duty, it is very necessary that our syllabi and curricula are formulated taking not only this Fundamental Duty but the other Fundamental Duties also into consideration.

H Narsimhaiah

## SOCIAL BASIS OF RATIONALISM

The Indian Constitution includes the responsibilities of the citizens along with their rights. Adopting and nourishing Scientific Outlook, Inquiring Attitude, Progressive Perspective and Humanist Stance are some of the most important responsibilities. The present state of affairs however is not at all conducive to the fulfilment of these responsibilities. The influence of the communalists and fundamentalists on the society has gradually increased. They have rendered the social psyche oversensitive regarding religion. The fraudulent Spiritualists - Babas and Buvas - who claim to know completely satisfying answers to all questions and solutions of all problems, are in abundance everywhere. The enthusiasm with which people respond to them is frightening. Side by side the market economy that encourages an insatiable consumerism is rapidly gaining ground. Violence is being supported and at times encouraged directly or indirectly in every walk of life. Under such circumstances it is becoming increasingly difficult for the activists in this field to establish any dialogue with the people in order to inculcate rationality in the society.

It is always possible to create an illusion that every scientific or rational thought is directly or indirectly related to faith. So any happening on being related to this or that faith becomes out of bound for all rational criticism and becomes a sort of

exercise your right of freedom of thought and expression some miscreants raise the problem of law and order and stop you from expressing your rational thoughts. In Maharashtra there has been an age old tradition of examining and criticizing obsolete customs and observances. Sawarkar had vehemently criticized the 'Vatasavitri Observance' long time back. But today the same Maharashtra has taken to an additional new observance, very similar to Vatasavitri, called 'Vaibhav Mahalakshmi' (meaning the goddess of wealth bringing) that has spread from the mega cities to the rural areas just in the last five years. Not a soul complained about this totally senseless observance that impudently destroys the environment. This is not out of ignorance or lack of care and responsibility but out of the fear of the religious mafias. And if one dares examine the thoughts of the Babas and the Buvas it becomes blasphemy and the militant followers of the spiritual Babas are out to teach you a lesson. Any thing against them in print will invite a lawsuit against the writer and publisher. Not only the corporal Babas and Buvas but even their lifeless photographs or the pictures of deities perform miracles. Nobody is allowed to examine these performances branding any examination violation of faith. Similarly many religious rituals create social problems. E.g. at the time of immersing the idols of lord Ganesh in water thousands of

tons of plaster of Paris that is not soluble in water, along with the various toxic and lethal colours are poured in the sources of water. Even the Supreme Court has in their ruling prohibited it. But even a peaceful movement to awaken people against this environment damaging tradition is threatened with dire consequences under the pretext of preservation of tradition and faith. There seems to be, in fact, very little piety and pure religiosity in this escalation of religious fairs, pilgrimages, festivals, celebration, week long prayers, revivals of old temples and building of new ones. The ulterior motive in all these activities is profit and petty politics. But the perpetrators of these acts are followed by such a huge number of devotees that it is next to impossible even to remain neutral, leave alone teaching them any sense. The worst part of this is that those who are responsible for bringing about a change in common people's psyche, themselves exploit the ignorance of the masses and encourage blind faith. News papers give long descriptions and attractive pictures of these ceremonies. The TV serials show unbelievable results produced by staunch and unflinching faith. Educational institutions and the teachers, administrators, students and their parents all participate enthusiastically in such religious functions dutifully. Even the state administration favours them in the name of 'honouring the popular sentiments'. Against this background the mandatory responsibility of the citizen of developing a scientific outlook, inquiring attitude, progressive perspective and humanist stance becomes pale and insignificant; almost unnoticeable. The activists of the rationalist movement with a feeling of helplessness keep doing their utmost in such adverse circumstances. The main responsibility of engendering this outlook in the populace rests on the three pillars-the educational institutions, the media and the administration. If they take a strong, determined and clear stand in this

regard it will greatly strengthen the rationalist movement.

### **Education**

In the state of Maharashtra there are 72,000 primary schools; 15,000 middle schools and 2000 colleges. Not only the number of students but even the number of teachers and college lecturers is huge enough to make an impact. In addition Scientific Outlook is the core of the content of education and inculcation of values. But every body in the field of education seems to be indifferent to it. One of the reasons is that the teachers themselves do not have a clear concept as to what is meant by scientific outlook. They are never given any training in developing this outlook in their students. Science is taught mechanically. The thought that "all happenings have cause-effect relationship which can be traced" is the mainstay of science but it is not even mentioned in the teaching of science. The religious organizations very aggressively take a stand that all criticism of the established superstitions, traditions, customs, and rituals including their relevance in the present times, is an assault on their religion. So people choose to maintain status co, in order to avoid confrontation and conflict. Criticism comes to a standstill. Superstitions, irrationality and unscientific outlook perpetuate. All of us-the administration, educational institutions, administrators, professors, teachers, their unions, students' unions and sane parents should take a firm stand. Efforts are on to develop a declaration regarding scientific awareness and eradication of superstition and obtain government approval for its effective use in education to do away with the present stagnation.

### **Administration**

In a democracy the administrative machinery is huge and vastly powerful. The administration even within the framework of the law can effectively help the citizens



carry out their responsibilities stipulated in the constitution or hamper it equally effectively in the same frame work. However it is a common experience that many officials in the administration be they police officers or gazetted officers are ignorant of the role they are required to play and the outlook they are to adopt. If any one insists on the responsibility towards scientific outlook, they generally look at it as nuisance or a law and order problem. This can be explained thus. Where ever organizations plan to deliver lectures on scientific outlook, eradication of superstition or criticism of religion the irrational but organized powers jump in covertly. They make an appeal to the rationalist organizations and the concerned police authority that the planned lecture is likely to upset the religious sentiments of the people which in turn may cause a law and order situation. The police promptly give a warning to the rationalist organization but never, on the other hand, notify the mischief mongers not to interfere with the function and to assure the organizers that no mischief mongers will be allowed to cause any harm to individuals or property. In the absence of such assurance the rationalist organization cancels their programme. Freedom of expression is denied and progress of rationalism is hampered. Training the police and other concerned officers in handling such situations appropriately will make a difference. But even in the absence of such training there are a few wise and mature officers who are able to bring about the necessary change. After the tragedy at Mandharadevi, the district officer of Satara effectively barred all the acts of sorcery like Bhanamati, being possessed by deities, knotted locks of hair, killing of animals and such other things. He was also able to stop the usual riot that regularly occurred on the issue of Afzalkhan's grave. Many times the elected representative do not support such firm measures. Yet even the presently available laws and a determined clear and

unambiguous stand by officers are crucial for the society to progress towards rational and secular outlook.

### **Media**

Whatever appears in the news papers or on the various TV channels acquires a sort of authoritative recognition in the minds of people. Religious ceremonies, the crowded fairs and gatherings at holy places have a commercial value because they are associated with the religious sentiments of millions of devotees. Selling these events is obviously a business of ample profit. The critical but inconvenient issue of the propriety or otherwise of telecasting these events has to be consigned to the waste paper basket. There is no question of taking a stand to oppose the whole madness, to enlighten the public about the wastage and futility of the affair and to expose exploitation by the vested interests. We have been moving in the backward direction in the last fifteen years in this regard. This becomes obvious when we examine the reports of the Kumbh Mela at Nashik during the years 1991 to 2003. Various superstitions and miracles make sensational news. The news paper editors defend themselves saying that they impartially report all that happens at the scene. They show the exciting pictures of crowds gathering to experience the miracle of the sea water turning sweet. But they never warn the people of the harm that may be caused or request for intervention by police to stop people from drinking the water or arrange interviews with scientists to inform the public about the reality. Instead what they do is to show the people only what they are likely to enjoy and thereby sell more. The media should go beyond this narrow mindset and avoid all sensational reporting. People at large are lazy enough to avoid any critical thinking. So it becomes all the more necessary that the media do not encourage this idle passive lapping up of whatever is offered them in the papers or on the screen. Many

incidents that occur around us can create critical awareness among people. They are reported by media but only at the level of simple and plain reporting of what happens. The values involved in them too should get prominence in the reporting.

To think rationally is, in fact, a natural human tendency and determines the direction of human progress. The opportunity and freedom that this rational thinking makes available to man frightens

some of us. The fear with the help of religion and faith hampers progress towards rationalism. The rationalist movement is undoubtedly a minority campaign which is certainly not in the interest of the society. Education, administration and media should contribute substantially and make it a mass movement. This is essential to create the New India as declared in the constitution.

Suman Oak

## **‘MONTHAN’ (CHURNING): REVELATION OF A RATIONALIST**

**‘MONTHAN’** is a collection of Marathi essays written by Y.J. Mahabal, a self-taught ardent rationalist. Some of these essays were written for progressive magazines in Marathi on which prolonged correspondence took place between author and readers. Some of the topics included in this book were transcripts of radio talks given by the author on various occasions. These have been well appreciated by the listeners. Though the essays have been written in eighties and nineties, still they are relevant even for the young generation of today.

A glance at the content of the book reveals that the author has tried to cover a full gamut of topics related to rationalism, which includes thought process, skepticism, scientific temper, knowledge, etc. The topics on atheism, spiritualism, peace of mind, importance of intelligence, advantages of rational thinking etc make the book worth reading. The detailed analysis on various topics covered by author is really very interesting and thought provoking. He makes difficult and complicated concepts easily understandable by lay readers. He has a sense of humour, which brings out the absurdities deep-rooted in the mass thinking. None of the essays are lengthy. That may be the one of the reasons that reader finishes the book in one sitting.

The author has tried his best to expose some of the myths about spiritualism, peace of mind, atheism, and Bhagvad Geeta. Commenting on Geeta is a very sensitive issue. Any positive or negative commentary on this ‘sacred book’ of Hindu religion invites criticism of so called pundits. . Author has dared enough to question the interpretation of the Slokas made by Dr Surindra Barlinge, a noted philosopher from Pune University. A War of the letter appeared in ‘Paramarsha’ a magazine published by the Department of Philosophy of Pune University makes compelling and interesting reading. .The author puts up questions like what is rationalism, what is atheism, etc and tries to answer in simple words.

Though the author has tried to explain the concepts in nutshell, the serious students of rationalism or philosophy will be disappointed since author has not gone into depths and explain the concepts in detail. Sometimes readers would like to have more detailed discussions. One can understand that due to limitations of space in the magazine-writing, author was not in a position to give full justice to the subject. However the details appeared in the book give sufficient insight to the concepts author has in his mind.

Since the book is written for Marathi speaking people, readers who do not

understand Marathi have been deprived of the pleasure of pursuing the subjects. Let us hope author will translate at least a few topics in English and publish an anthology of essays in English for reading population at large.

**Prabhakar Nanawaty**

<mailto:pkn.ans@gmail.com> **MANTHAN**

*An Anthology of essays in Marathi*  
Godavary Prakashan (2000), pp 190+  
Rs 160/-

The copies can be obtained from writing to following address:

Y.J Mahabal  
E-1-6, First Floor, SBI Colony, Kumud  
Nagar, SV Road,  
Goregaon (W), MUMBAI 400062

## BIANNUAL CONFERENCE OF FEDERATION OF INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (FIRA)

Biannual Conference of FIRA was held on 27 – 28, April 2007 at BJS College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Pune. The conference was organized jointly by Maharashtra Andhashradha Nirmoolan Samitee (MANS) and Bharatiya Jain Sanghatana. A large number of dignitaries and reps of Rationalist Organizations from all over India attended the conference and participated in the deliberations. While inaugurating the conference, Dr G Vijayam of Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, stressed upon the importance of scientific attitude to bring the desired changes in the society. Dr N D Patil, Chairman, Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, MANS and the Conference, mentioned the necessity to pass the Bill on anti-superstition pending with Maharashtra Assembly for very long time. Dr Jayant Naralikar commented upon the necessity of skeptical views on current new fads like Feng Shui, astrology, Vaastushastra etc.

During the plenary session on Rationalism and Role of Media, Anand Agashe, executive Director of Sakal Newspapers Group, suggested that it is high time to utilize the electronic media like internet, SMS, and bloggers to convey the message in the society. Sameeran Valvekar, EMRC, Pune University and Dr DD Bandiste, philosopher also participated in the deliberations. Dr Yashavant Sumant of Pune University and Dr D B Parikh, Retd Vice Chancellor, Gujarat University spoke on various aspects of secularism.

B Premanand, who had made rationalism as his life time mission was honored by FIRA during the conference. Concluding session was attended by Dr Narendra Jadhav, Vice Chancellor of Pune University and Dr Sriram Lagoo, a staunch rationalist, amongst many other dignitaries.

**Dr Rajendra Kankaria**

**Dear Readers,**

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# THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build



Rationalist Society

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## ROOT CAUSES OF INDIAN REGRESSION

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Neither fate nor foreigners nor genes nor sins caused our demise as a strong nation and our degradation into depths of destitution. We ourselves are responsible for our fall. But we were not born dumb. Our great culture killed us, making us disabled to create or compete. Our traditional beliefs, values and attitudes lie at the root of our problems. Which beliefs, values and attitude? As they say, the evil is in the detail. But very briefly, they are: Fatalism, Contentment, Irrationality, Obsession with spirituality, Faith, Elevation of poverty and renunciation as desirable values, Encouraging tradition and discouraging creativity -- and many more. Such beliefs led to the neglect of this world, diversion of resources to abstract pursuits, inertia negativity in worldly affairs. They lie at the root of our regression.

Understanding of our spirituality is of critical importance to gaining a real understanding of India's problems. With all due respect for anyone's personal beliefs, we must objectively scrutinize the positive as well as the negative sides of spirituality and what consequences flow from it, whether intended or not. We need a realistic cost-benefit analysis of our culture and religion. They had their day; they block us today. We must revolutionize our religion based value system. This takes clarity, thinking out of the box and unconventional ideas. These are things for which most of us Indians are not too famous.

S Subodh  
From the Book  
*Culture can Kill*

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## RELIGION

## AND

## CHILD

## ABUSE

Over the years, the abuse of children has received substantial attention worldwide. The United Nations, through its member organizations such as UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), has focused on this issue, recognizing the worst forms of such abuse. These include child labor, in which an estimated 250 million children are engaged in some form due to the practice of slavery, bondage linked to family debts, or serfdom; as well as the forced recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflicts, child pornography and prostitution, and the

production and trafficking of illicit drugs. The International Labor Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and UNESCO hold regular discussions at various levels and organize international conventions. The UN has adopted a world declaration for the protection of children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The human rights of children and the standards to which all governments must aspire in realizing these rights for all children are most concisely and fully articulated in one international human-rights treaty: the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention is the most universally accepted human-rights instrument in history. It



has been ratified by every country in the world except two: the United States and Somalia. It places children at center stage in the quest for the universal application of human rights. By ratifying this instrument, national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights and have agreed to hold themselves accountable for this commitment before the international community. While it is unfortunate that a powerful country such as the United States has yet to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN's efforts are salutary and place much-needed emphasis on improving the lives of children globally.

### Influence of Religion

However, despite all the effort and rhetoric about protecting children and their rights, there is a severe shortcoming in the global campaign to protect children: the influence of religion and its continuing contribution to many forms of child abuse all around the world.

Such abuse begins with the involuntary involvement of children in religious practices from the time they are born. All religions, through ritual, preaching, and religious texts, seek to bring children into day-to-day religious practice. This gives holy books and scriptures, as well as those who teach them, an early grip on the developing minds of young

people, leaving an indelible impression on them. In many cases, most notably in the Catholic Church, this forced and prolonged exposure of children to religious institutions has also been a key factor in the physical, mental, and sexual abuse of children by religious leaders.

This early grip is so strong that very few people, once grown, ever get an opportunity to change their minds, despite being exposed to science and rational thinking, or even other religious systems. Religious beliefs thrive by imposing themselves upon impressionable minds and gaining their blind adherence to certain dogmatic practices. In some ways, this lays the groundwork for sustained psychological abuse of young children by allowing adults the use of religion as a pretext for various other forms of abuse such as forcing them to fight in wars in the name of religion and ethnicity. During 2004, about 300,000 children served as soldiers in national armies, worldwide.

When it comes to the forced inculcation of religion and the resulting abuses of children in the name of religion, the UN, all of its affiliated organizations, and almost

all national governments remain steadfastly silent.

### UN's Reluctance

In one form or another, all religions violate the rights of children. Yet a body like the UN, which allows the Vatican to be represented among its member countries, is unaware of—or more likely—unable and unwilling to stand up to the Vatican regarding the religious abuse of children. There is significant pressure from the Vatican to pull back on or dilute any resolutions that point to religion as a cause of abuse or strife. Add to this the unwillingness of the UN to confront its member countries, especially those in the Muslim world, which can also exert a lot of pressure when it comes to issues related to the abuse of children by their religious schools (madararas) where, for example, very young children are forced to memorize six thousand verses of the Qur'an, a process that involves both mental and physical abuse.

As a result, the UN and its affiliated agencies tend to focus on addressing just the symptoms rather than the root causes of some of the most insidious forms of child abuse. For example, while everyone speaks out against genital mutilation, UNICEF is unwilling to acknowledge and condemn it as a religious practice. Instead, it talks about educating communities and spends millions of dollars on medical

kits to treat those children who have already been mutilated. By not forcefully pointing the finger at the real culprits—religious practices—the UN is not only missing a good opportunity to fix the problem at its source but also putting too small a bandage on a very deep wound.

### Gender Discrimination

Another area in which religions contribute to child abuse is through explicit and implicit gender discrimination that leads to unequal rights and opportunities between boys and girls and contributes to further abuses. While economic factors are also to blame, the roots of this inequity lie in religious and social mores. How can the UN hope to tackle the problem of child labor or a lack of educational opportunity among the children in 130 developing countries who are not in primary school, the majority of them being girls? In the Islamic world, some female students are allowed to attend certain madarassas. However, they are forced to learn in classrooms, or even buildings, separate from their male peers.

There is a global unwillingness to acknowledge that all religions use their educational institutions and programs, be they Sunday schools, madarassas, or Jewish or Hindu temples to indoctrinate children. Sometimes, this is in

the guise of conveying good moral values, but, while it may be much more rigid and overt in, say, a madarassa, it is no less influential on young minds in a Christian Sunday school.

Ultimately, all such programs try to instill a belief in the superiority of one religion and inculcate an unquestioning faith in that system.

### Debate Must Begin!

Just as we all stand up against child marriage, because marriage is an institution meant for adults, and just as we do not let children participate in certain civic duties, such as voting, until they reach a certain age, the time has come to debate the participation of children in religious institutions. While some might see it as a matter better left to parents, the negative influence of religion and its subsequent contribution to child abuse from religious beliefs and practices requires us to ask whether organized religion is an institution that needs limits set on how early it should have access to children.

There is no doubt that this will be a controversial position. However, there is nothing to prevent the UN from organizing a world convention on the issue of

the religious abuse of children, influence on children can be openly debated. The world body cannot remain silent on this vital issue just because it is a sensitive and difficult subject, even a forum where the pros and cons of childhood exposure to religion and its given its member nations and their religious interests. A convention like this would also be an opportunity for those who might want to argue for the benefits of the influence of religion on children, so the UN should not shy away from debate of the issue.

If such a convention clearly shows that religion contributes to child abuse globally, the UN must then take a clear stand on the issue of the forced involvement of children in religious practices; it must speak up for the rights of children and not the automatic right of parents and societies to pass on religious beliefs, and it must re-examine whether an organization like the Vatican should belong to the UN. Until this happens, millions of children worldwide will continue to be abused in the name of religion, and the efforts made by the UN will continue to address the symptoms but not the disease.

**N.Innaiah**

# OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE

"I began to move through tunnels in my mind, very brightly coloured and getting more and more real. There began to be places, which appeared very very clearly ... I was thinking how high was in the sense that on looking down, my feet seemed a very long way away... I suddenly realized that I was high up and looking down on my own body. I think at this point I was at about ceiling level and gently drifting about. Soon after I had begun talking, I saw the cord. I looked down from where I was and saw, apparently coming from where my tummy should be, a cord. It was not really any colour, but

slowly moving... I reached out my hand but found two things. Firstly if I wanted a hand I could have one, or as many as I liked. Secondly it was not necessary to have a hand. I could move the cord at will, and have great fun doing it too. I was quite consciously talking all this time but very fast, as I wanted to say so much and tell them every thing I was doing." –Susan Blackmore, lecturer and writer, recounting her own out-of-body experience during her student days at Oxford, from The Archives of Scientists' Transcendent Experiences. Out of Body Experiences (OBEs) are brief, bizarre

experiences involving a sensation floating outside one's body, perceiving the world from a location outside one's physical body and by means other than the physical senses. Around one in 10 to 20 people have an OBE at least once in their lifetime, according to a BBC report. Though many skeptics dismiss them as dreams or dream-like sequences, researchers agree that OBEs happen when the person is fully awake and conscious.

Quite a few seem to happen when the person is in bed, resting or ill, or under the influence of psychedelic drugs. OBEs are also very closely related to near-death experiences (NDEs). Unlike most drug-induced hallucinations or dreams, OBEs are not unstable and fleeting; they do not dissolve rapidly into something else. They seem as real and solid as the perceived world around us. As Dr. Blackmore claims, "somehow words fail to convey how completely real it seemed at the time." Recounts Devdeep Bhattacharya, a student of IIM-Kolkata who had an OBE when he was in school, "I was on my bed lying face down, trying to sleep, when I had this weird feeling that I was afloat a few inches above my body, tied to it by silvery cords. It must have lasted a few minutes... after which I suddenly plopped back into my own body, as if pulled down by gravity, and seemed to wake up. At that time I had no

idea about out-of-body experiences... it was only a few years later when I came across other similar experiences of people on the web that I realized that the phenomenon had a name."

Usha Ram, a professor in the department of psychology, Pune varsity, says, "OBEs are still treated in the realm of parapsychology and at present, studies and research regarding these experiences don't fit within standard theoretical models accepted by science or scientific methodologies currently practised. In spite of this, we are currently moving towards study of what is presently called paranormal, and I hope soon enough the research into that area would also be regarded as scientific." According to her, there are various techniques among them yoga and reiki, through which some people have cultivated the faculty of inducing OBEs, also known as astral projection.

Agrees Nandini Gulati, psychotherapist and a student of Brian Weiss, prominent British psychiatrist dealing in past life regression, "OBES are usually induced when a person is undergoing an intense emotion or stress, like pain, grief or love, even in those who are otherwise spiritually inclined. I don't think science has a definitive explanation for out-of-body experiences... Moreover, if spirituality offers better insight into the cycle of life and death and offers

comfort and strength, a scientific explanation is not required. I think it is a great insight into the meaning of being alive and human."

She has herself undergone a series of OBEs and describes one experience, "heard a buzzing sound in my ears, and had the feeling of leaving my body and floating above... At that time, I was residing in London, and I had the distinct feeling of floating above London and seeing roofs and the people walking in the street. I had a similar buzzing sensation when I was being pulled back into my body, by a force which was almost magnetic. The experience lasted about 15 minutes." She also asserts being able to leave her body at will, though the duration is much shorter. "It strengthens my belief that we are more than just our corporeal selves, and consciousness can exist beyond the physical body."

The debate between science and faith cannot be resolved so easily. Recent studies show that at least some OBEs can be induced through electrical stimulation. A researcher accidentally stumbled upon bizarre results while treating a couple of female epileptic patients. This was the first scientific evidence that OBEs might have the

brain to blame. When electric current was delivered to the angular gyrus of the brain's temporal parietal junction, responsible for integrating visual information and the sense spatial location, of one patient, she had the sensation of floating in the air looking down at her own body. In the other patient, it produced an eerie feeling that someone was right behind her trying to interfere with her actions. Says Dr Joydev Mukherji, head neurology, Max Hospitals, states "OBES are yet to be defined in clear scientific terms. There are some closely related conditions like, for example, sleep paralysis, a temporary paralysis of the body which occurs either just before the person falls off to sleep, or when the brain wakes up after REM ( rapid eye movement) sleep, and the body hasn't. It's possibly in a condition like that when a person has an OBE. We also look at lower levels of melatonin (neurohormone) as a possible explanation. All the same, studies on these experiences are still pretty rare."

**Shatarupa Chakraborty**

*Courtesy:*

*Times News Network*

## SPIRITUAL PRETENCE OF THE GODMEN & RATIONALISM

The path of the rationalist movement is full of difficulties and challenges. One of those challenges is the spiritual pretensions of the god men. The nature of Adhyatma (spiritualism) of these men is different from that of the traditional Baba-Buvas. Their language is modern and sophisticated. With a few exceptions they refrain from performing miracles. They guarantee ethical sublimation to their disciples. Their spiritualism has a philosophical foundation and is coupled with some social service or other. One tends to ask at the first glance, 'So, what is wrong in all this?'

The people of this country are enamoured of the word 'Adhyatma' and all the practices and rituals that go with it. Although there are different opinions regarding the concept of Adhyatma there is some common understanding about its nature. Generally it is believed that – Adhyatmic principle is different than the material principle in that unlike

the material principle it is a vital principle; for various reasons it gets shrouded in ignorance and becomes impure; being caught in various bindings it suffers. When this vital principle becomes aware of itself, i.e. realizes what it is, the vital principle- Atma becomes one with the Paramatma it attains unending bliss. This certainly is a very charming idea and we need not enter into the debate whether it is scientifically true. For the present let us only consider how to recognize such a sublime Adhyatmic (spiritual) person? There is a standard answer to this. Such a person is self restrained, virtuous and would never take what belongs to others. Truth and non-violence are the core principles of his life. He is moved by the sorrow of other people and acts for the good of human beings out of compassion. He is an idol of purity and piety. He lives in this material world but his life illustrates that there is some thing more precious and beatific beyond this material world and it is several times more valuable than this corporal life. Swami Vivekananda, Gadge Baba, Gandhi, Vinoba and a few others are excellent examples of this.

A number of saints in Maharashtra with this line of thinking did valuable social work. Charity, forgiveness, truth and altruism are the most cherished values in the literature produced by these saints. Gadge Baba used to say, 'God does not reside in the temples; he stays in the hearts of human beings.' This is the back ground against which we should examine the present abundant crop of spiritual Buvas and Babas. On one side is the saint Gadge Baba a standard bearer of selfless service while on the other side are rallied our modern spiritualist self styled Baba, Maharaj, Swami and Acharya. These so called Adhyatmic personalities never think of liberating the ordinary men and women from poverty, hunger, ignorance, diseases, exploitation, ritualistic practices, etc. They did not care to teach them dignity of labour or strike at the senseless superstitions; nor did they endeavour to purify the concept of god and religion in the minds of the common people. Instead of caring for the lame, helpless needy people, these modern spiritualists wrest personal service from them. Instead of pulling out the ignorant from the quagmire of rituals they organize big pompous and wishful Pooja rituals for satiating their vainglory. They wear garlands round their own necks but do not remove the noose round the neck of the common man. Of course



cleaning the streets with a broom in their own hands, excavating gutters, living in a hut, wearing tattered clothes and eating only a small piece of bread from the palm and gulping it with water is not their cup of tea. This was Gadge Baba's mission which he observed throughout his life.

Recently Satya Sai Baba celebrated his 80th birthday with all pomp and show. The birthday bash was dutifully telecast by all TV channels and reported in the print by all news papers. In the prestigious daily, Hindustan Times, Veer Sanghavi, the noted journalist raised some questions in his article 'The Truth of Satya Saibaba'. He writes, you get a number of evidences of Satya Sai Baba's perverse homosexual activities on the internet with the help of Google search engine. All these victims of Baba's lust were in earlier times his devotees. A few of them might be bogus but all can not be so. How can hundreds of them publicly complain of sexual exploitation? This Baba performs miracles like pulling out gold chains, costly watches from thin air and a 'Shivalinga' from his mouth. This he or his devotees claim to be the sign of his divinity. But such miracles are common for any magician. Why doesn't the Baba allow others to examine him before performing these miracles to prove his divinity? Why does he not pull out from thin air any

thing that is bigger than his fist? Why did this god man hide himself in the bath room when his own disciples attacked him? Another example is Asaram Bapu of Surat in the Gujarat state. This whole sale trader in Adhyatma secured for his institution a huge piece of land worth Rs. 40 crores for a throw away price of Rs. 29 lakhs. The Gujarat High Court castigated the authorities severely and ordered that the land be freed from encroachment by the Bapu's institution and handed over to the District Collector within three months. Asaram Bapu has established Ashrams in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar which are presently in dispute. Narendra Maharaj, one more godman openly talks about creation of a Hindu Rashtra (not secular but Hindu nation) and brazenly challenges the constitution. He instigates his disciples to indulge in violence against his opponents telling them to cut off their hands and feet. When he was asked to keep his religious sceptre away from him, while in the aeroplane, his disciples created a riot on the airport damaging its property. Yet another god man Aniruddha Bapu claims that he knows the past and future births of all

his disciples and also that he appears before them as different deities. The famous Ramdeo Baba gives a list of incurable diseases like cancer, AIDS, epilepsy, etc. on his website and claims that all these diseases can be cured by Ayurvedic medicine and regularly practicing Pranayama. The central ministry of health have served a notice on him in this connection. This Baba who is building 'Patanjali Yoga Peeth', a university for Patanjali Yoga, at a stupendous cost of Rs 100 crores does not pay his workers in the Ayurvedic medicine factory even the minimum wages. He maintains that there is nothing wrong in it. Despite these and many more revelations of wrongdoings and corruption by the god men, their roaring business remains in tact. It is, therefore, all the more necessary and urgent to begin a harsh criticism of this phenomenon, for, this 'Buvabaji' is leading the public away from the legitimate social problems and their solutions and changing their awareness and understanding regarding the real causes of their difficulties. Under the influence of the Babas and Buvas taking action to solve the problems is altogether out of the question.

People today are more self-centred and absorbed in themselves. They do not like to talk about social commitment or equality and want immediate solutions to their own problems, stresses and strains. The

modern Adhyatma offers ready made answers to their problems. The answers are deceptive but appealing and capture the imagination of educated young generation. In fact the path shown by these god men leads our young generation to run after the mirage called “Moksha” that brings all investigating endeavours to a stand still. It contains the seeds of demolition of the social fabric. If the crowd that is presently enamoured of Adhyatmic Buvabaji is diverted towards progressive social organizations then we can hope for some social change.

The depraved poor people of the ‘Bahujan Samaj’ turn to the ‘Babas’ to get relief from their poverty and the accompanying difficulties. The well-to-do educated middle class go to the ‘Maharaj’, who preach ‘live and let live’ policy. And the highly educated higher middle class go to ‘Acharya’ in search of ‘the art of living’. All these three institutions-Baba, Maharaj and Acharya- are individual centred. They start with the dictum-if the individual changes, the society will change. Next they preach the audience to uplift their own selves and progress. Finally they ask them to leave all the problems of their lives to the Adhyatmic powers of the god man and surrender to him. The audience is convinced that their beatitude lies in the total surrender to the god man. This whole process gradually de-

socialises the individual. Today all our energy is spent in fighting superstitions of the primary state. Those who do not openly indulge in deceit and exploitation but harbour very regressive thoughts and act accordingly as do the Maharaj are unfortunately left alone. And the fight against the Acharya is altogether out of the question. Such Babas hold workshops for personality development provide health facilities and also do some other socially useful work. But they also generate indifference and aloofness towards progressive movements, administration, community life and even generates religious hatred at times. All this leads to the destruction of youth’s reasoning and gives it a wrong direction. This is quite dangerous and does not have a simple solution. We can only chalk out the direction thus: on one hand there is the responsibility of determining what is truth and what is not, what is right and what is not right. For centuries, religion provided the answer to this. Scientific outlook fulfilled this responsibility in the field of investigation of knowledge and this was accepted by religion too. But in addition, with the help of rational thinking,

scientific outlook also could find answers to questions such as- what kind of life should one live; what is good and what is bad; what should be the ideal of human life, etc. in the behavioural field. Adhyatma might do it too. But in the field of ethics, the difficulty Adhyatma faces is that the scriptures and the prophets’ words of different religions differ widely and at times contradict each others. Many times the ethical grain gets lost in this confusion and attention is concentrated on the sheer husk of rituals that remains. We all experience this every day. So even in the ethical domain rationalism will have to undertake a critical appraisal of what is a ‘good life’. On the other side, in action, every rationalist will have to resolve that he will never loose the faith he has in himself. Dignity of a human being lies in living one’s life with the humanist stance, how and to what extent they can be solved. We all have a Guru in our own honestly and with courage. With the help of reason we are capable of identifying our problems and also understanding rationality to make us aware and alert. The individual’s journey on the path of life, under the guidance of his Guru within, is the essence of his life, liberation from Adhyatmic Buvabaji and also foundation of a healthy society.

**Dr. Narendra Dabholkar**

# Dangerous

# YOGA

Despite the Emergency, some orthopaedicians in this country have fond memories of the seventies. It was good time for them. The influence of Dharendra Brahmachari, the yogic mentor of the Nehru family, was at its peak. Many people who tried to imitate his rubber like movements and impeccable headstands, ended up at clinics. Some had broken their backs, others complained neck-aches. Today, the number of such cases is many times higher. With yoga having successfully colonized the urban mind, there is severe

shortage of good yoga teachers. Gurus are now being mass manufactured, or are manufacturing themselves, to meet the huge demand. Since there no yogic certificates, the credentials of trainers cannot be verified by the learners. Sometimes these gurus are only-one crash course old. If yoga is not done properly, it can cause harm, and many aspirants are increasingly bearing the consequences of shallow yogic teachers.

Orthopaedician Dr. Nandu Lad of Mumbai has come across many cases of cervical spondylitis (pain in the shoulder blade) resulting from improper practice of yoga. Knee pains and backaches, he says, are the most common side-effects. Forty-year old Harsha Chhada, who had joined an institute in the Kandivali suburb of Mumbai, returned from the classes every day with a painful back. "It was very difficult for me to cope especially with the stretching exercises," says Chhada, who now plans to train under a personal yoga teacher.

Half-baked yoga teachers today not only impart faulty techniques but also lack communications skills and sensitivity. Women who learn from a young man in Mumbai are wary of him because he corrects their poses violently, pushing their backs or shaking their shoulders. Also, he is so embarrassed to use the word 'buttocks' that he instead says, "toilet muscles" confusing new entrants.

In principle, yoga is a powerful healer. But it is truly beneficial only when customized for each individual. There are several instances of students who have fainted after performing headstands. Institutes that have reputation to guard have outpatient departments where a doctor conducts checkups. This is followed by a closed-door interview. Personal details of the patient's mental and physical condition are collected. Patients with high blood pressure, hypertension and heart diseases are advised against performing headstands and other asanas that could aggravate their problems. Some postures may also cause internal bleeding in those with ulcers. Also, yoga is not exactly an ad-hock cure as it is advertised by some. It is a way of life, like music and diet. Its influence is evident only in the long term. Sports injury specialist Dr. Anant Joshi says that short-term yoga camps conducted for Indian cricket team before a tour may make

good photo-ops but do not serve the purpose. Before the recent Bangladesh tour, Joshi remembers fast bowler Munif Patel complaining backache as a consequence of two-day camp conducted by a yoga coach from Singapore.

However, the teacher may not always be at fault. It is the tendency of people to look for relief that, like a perverse version of coffee, is instant. Serious yoga gurus are tired of meeting people who come to them with pre-determined aims like say, "shedding ten kilos" and those who check the weighing scales immediately after yoga session. Though it may be India's best-known export, the natives practice yoga only when compelled by disease or condition. In their desperation, they overdo. Hansa Jayadeva, director of the Yoga Institute in the Santacruz, remembers a hernia patient who would sit in front of his TV set and follow Ramdev's famous stomach jerks every day. This led to hiatus hernia, a painful condition. A year ago, newspapers were agog with reports of the former Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai G R Khairnar who went the golden-egg way after practicing 12 hours a day. Sometimes, he even would

lock himself up in the bathroom for six hours at a stretch to do yoga. This routine soon landed him in the ICU.

There have also been instances of people performing the "kapalbhati", a breathing process, over a hundred times in a stretch which

#### BACKFIRE ASANAS (If not done the right way)

- **SHIRSHASANA:** Giddiness, harm to the delicate capillaries of the eyes
- **PAVANMUKTASANA:**
- Worsens ailments like ulcers, hiatus hernia
- **PARYANKASANA:** Damage to the knee
- **KAPALBHATI:** Diarrhoea

may result in giddiness and even diarrhoea.

The most extreme cases of phony yoga are, of course, imparted in developed countries. Dogs are taught there, and there is a new genre called 'nude yoga' where everybody is encouraged to strip and merge their egos.

**Sharmila Ganeshan**  
Courtesy:  
*Times News Network*

# ‘SANATAN’ CULTURE

‘Save yourself from the clutches of the Brahmanical attitude’ was the message given by Smt. Prashanti Talapankar, a journalist and activist, at the public meeting convened by the Goa Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti. This meeting was organized to protest against the criticism unleashed by the Sanatana Sanstha on Mahatma Phule.

She further said: Ram’s greatness cannot be proved just by remaining faithful to his only wife-Sita. Why should Ram, who made Sita to undertake the fire ordeal to prove her innocence but never deemed it necessary to prove his own fidelity, be made the idol of the Bharateeya Culture? Similarly the Prophetic Krishna, could have with his miraculous powers transformed the helplessness of the thousand women he rescued, into self confidence to face their adverse situation instead of marrying them all in one stroke. Was he the only man in his day that had any sympathy for those hapless women? The fact is that both Ram and Krishna

were human beings and the religious scriptures that converted them into deities and supreme beings are fictitious and fraudulent. That today’s woman is self dependent and confident of herself is due to Jotiba and Savitribai Phule and not because of any Sanatan Culture or any adorable idol like Ram, Krishna, Sita or Savitri.

Yadnyeshwar Nigale, the President of the Goa ANS, Dadu Mandrekar, Ramesh Gavas, President of the Rashtra Seva Dal and Jawahar Barve were on the dais. The senior intellectual Arjun Parab presided. He said: ‘Provoking people in the name of religion and worship so as to suppress all progressive thought and to avengethose who dare spread any fresh thinking is a cunning intrigue of the Brahmanical orthodoxy. Blind belief in the ‘Word’ has duped our nation. The orthodox culture can never produce intellectuals; it breeds only irrational spiritualists. No one

cared to understand the true Indian culture. The orthodox Hindus uphold casteism even today; we must find out who supports these orthodox people. At least two castes exist today: the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins, the former dominating over the latter. Although any amount of domination cannot kill the progressive thought the fact that the Bahujan-samaj follows them foolishly is a cause for worry.’

Dadu Mandrekar said, ‘Phule was despised by those orthodox Brahmins because he exposed the dangers involved in the caste system. Athavale tells us to contemplate over our family deity. But I fail to understand why should one contemplate and worship a deity that has never emancipated his family and the ancestors? Phule, although branded Brahmin hater by the Sanatanis was, in fact, never hostile to Brahmins. He opposed not the Brahmin individuals but the Brahmanical attitude of self importance and arrogance towards the down trodden Dalits and tried to build



self esteem in them. Athavale should live the life of a Mahar to understand all this. He does not

seem to feel embarrassed or guilty about the existence of 6000 low castes and tribe in this country. Is his preaching of spirituality capable of producing even a single Savitribai? Where is the need to follow such a preacher as Athavale when the Constitution is there to solve the problems of all citizens?’

This is what Ramesh Gavas had to say. ‘This present book that censures Phule does not bear the name of the editor. Athavale seems to be scared to own its editorship, lest the ulterior motive behind it sneaks out. This hiding and distorting of facts to deceive people is an age-old strategy inherited from the Vedas. The traditional Brahmins make thorough use of the technological advances made by materialism and preach others not to be lured by materialism.’ While giving a fitting reply to Phule’s critics, Gavas traced the Vedic Tradition and said, ‘Those who challenged the Brahmanical system, refuted the Vedas and other discriminatory traditions were disgraced and denied by the Brahmins. Those who want to understand spirituality should turn to J. Krishnamoorthy, away from the ilk of Athavales. Only then they will come to know what the Athavales have done to the concept of spirituality. These are the people who mix up the two

concepts of nationhood and other worldliness. They opposed Phule and now they are opposing the Hindu Code Bill. Its high time their perverse mentality is investigated.

Nigale remarked that the person who allows himself to be called Paramapoojya- Most revered- is in fact a great Poojya, i.e., a zero. They need people who mortgage their intellect and give up all independent thinking. They know how to lure naive people into blindly following them. He stressed the importance of freedom of speech that ANS upholds. It is utterly necessary that the other side of all great men, deities and gods are revealed, of course, not scandalizing but showing them in a proper perspective. Those who criticize progressive thinkers and activists should examine their own merit. He invited people to have dialogue with ANS on religion, spirituality and science.

Milan Vaingankar introduced the dignitaries on the dais and Subhash Bandekar expressed gratitude to all. Suvarna Naroji conducted the proceedings.

**Yadnyeswar Nigale**

## Protecting the Gullible People

Unless the government changes its education policy the country has no future. Now education is in the hands of unscrupulous who propagate miracles, superstitions and blind beliefs. Science is only the knowledge of nature and Universe. Unless our people are educated in scientific temper, we have no hope. The gullible will go after miracle-men for an easy solution to their mundane problems. However much we expose the godmen, the credulous will go the next one who has yet to be exposed. Even those who are exposed appear again and again when people forget the exposure and the new generation comes up.

Unless the people comes together to see that our law is enforced against the culprits, exploitation will continue. Otherwise people will have to take the law in their own hands. This will lead our country into chaos. This is what is happening in India. The militant activities are increasing day by day wherein thousands of innocent people are being murdered. The government cannot suppress the people without enforcing **EQUALITY OF LAW AND JUSTICE** and encouraging illegal activities and fraud. They have the duty to protect the citizens being exploited by the frauds. Let us hope that the governments will come forward in enforcing law and protecting the gullible people.

**B Premanand**  
From his Book

**“Science Versus Miracles” (1994)**

# NATURE PAYS PRICE OF VISARJAN

A 20-foot brightly painted, ornamented and adorned Ganesha idol shouldered through streets by a swarm of chanting devotees and lowered into the sea may be a spectacular sight, but visarjans have a more unsettling reality. The chemical composition of the idol leaves the ecology a lot poorer. On the final day of Ganapati immersions in Mumbai, over 31,200 small idols and 5400 big idols took

their annual dip in ponds, lakes and the Arabian Sea amidst chants of *Pudhachya varshi lavakarya!* (Come back again next year)'. But that's one line environmentalists dread to hear. With 99% of the idols made of plaster-of-paris (PoP) instead of eco-friendly clay and sprayed with harmful chemical dyes, the immersions are being seen as a 'red sign' by the greens.

Not just Mumbai, idol immersion is the norm during festival season in Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Kolkata. An ecological warning was sounded at the Kankaria Lake in Ahmedabad when scores of dead fish surfaced after 2000 idols were immersed. PoP idols caused a drop in dissolved oxygen (DO) levels. Kamala Nehru Zoo superintendent said, "An impermeable layer was formed on the surface because of the idols and colours. Absence of sunlight augmented the effect, and the DO level had gone down to zero."

Over the years, Ganapati idols have become bigger and far more in numbers. Almost all of them use harmful substances and materials that do not dissolve easily in water. Every year, over one lakh idols are immersed,

leading to serious environmental issues. The gold and silver shimmer used on the tusk, ears and the ornaments contain some of the most poisonous and dangerous chemicals that, when consumed, can affect the brain and cause genetic mutations. These chemicals are heavy metals like lead, mercury, arsenic, nickel, cadmium and chromium.

The colours used on the idols such as bicarbonates, copper, sulphur, sodium and phosphorous are equally unhealthy. When these dissolve in water, they form a layer blocking the sunlight from entering the water. This kills the dissolved oxygen, which is life threatening to the aquatic life and also the water body becomes nothing but muddy and murky, spreading stench and germs all around, say experts.

If the practice of immersion has to be retained as a ritual, we must make efforts to ensure that there is element in the idol that damages the ecology. Sadly, no effort has been made to educate the artistes who make the idols. In 2000, Kolkata High Court passed an order based on the Water (Prevention and control of pollution) Act, 1974. Its directive to the West Bengal Pollution Control Board to take steps to prevent pollution in the river during immersion and the

clean-up thereafter, but action has, at best, half-hearted. Montu Pal, a leading artist at South Asia's largest potter's colony, Kumarhalli, acknowledges the use of cheap paint powder bought from the wholesale market but they had little option given the stagnant price of idols. From the average Rs 35,000 – 40,000 that an artist earns from each idol, the paint job eats up to Rs 10,000.

"We would love to use vegetable dyes but these are costly. If these were available to us at reasonable price, we'd be more than happy to use them," the idol-maker said. With nearly 5 kg of powder paint used in each idol, the 4500-odd Durga idols that are immersed in the Hoogly river discharge 22.5 tonne of toxic metal residues, contaminating the water and damaging aquamarine life. The PCB studies revealed significant amounts of metals like chromium and lead but scientists were quick to counter it with insignificant change in the river's chemical oxygen demand.

In Hyderabad, too, experts say one can teach a science class by examining the chemicals used in the making of Ganesha idols that are immersed every year in the Hussain Sagar and 21,000 water bodies in the state.

**Courtesy: Times of India**

## DEATH OF MY FATHER

Well, to those who may think that I am bringing my personal affairs let me clarify. It is not just about my father's death, but all about rituals connected with it. My father was in advanced state of renal failure and breathed his last on July 17th. At this time eldest son, yours truly was at a place called Pithorgarh, 2000 m above sea level (and 2000 km from my place!) conducting a training programmed for activists of the Kumaon region about scientific temper and methods to create such awareness among people.

As the eminent existentialist – Albert Camus – said, society judges a man by what he does when his mother dies. In fact, his magnum opus, *The Outsider*, is all about the protagonist's reaction

to his mother's death, and how his other actions are all judged based on that.

It was not my father's demise was a sudden, unforeseen event. When I had started on my tour on the 7th of July, it was clear to me by the attending nephrologist that he wanted to be instructed on the course of treatment before I embarked on my trip. He informed me that my father would not last more than a fortnight. So, I told him to keep him comfortable and not to take any heroic steps to prolong life. For, he was 87; diabetic, hypersensitive and both his kidneys had failed. Any prolongation of life was going to be an agony for him and his loved ones.

It is the custom in every society to have elaborate rituals connected with death and the subsequent dispatch of the departed person's soul to the heavenly abode. But, the degree of this seems to have reached the peak among Hindus, the religion into which my father was born. The very same problems had been ached by us when my mother died in 1995. That time due to my refusal to perform the rites connected with the death, I had earned the wrath of my maternal family as well as my father's family.

The news of my father's death reached me in the middle of a discussion with a group of

trainees and perhaps by my expression that something was wrong, when I explained the reason, they were all sympathy and were reconciled to going back as they were expecting the programmed to be cancelled. I said, I would continue, they were surprised.

For, Uttaranchal is a state, full of many superstitions. A death in the family, they said was a torture for the living. The ceremonies connected with that involved such an expenditure that the living would envy the dead! The priestly class had to be fed and given various gifts including a year's provisions. One can imagine this being hilly area where people have to resort to terrace cultivation and scratch out a meager living. Not that they are the only ones. In Tamil Nadu one of my Brahmin friends informed me that after cremating the departed, the fellow Brahmins go to the residence of the deceased for a meal. They sit down for the feast after tying a length of banana plant fiber round the waist. The custom is that they eat until it gets cut by the distension of stomach. The grieving family has to forget their sorrow to cook a variety of dishes for these gluttons, including a few varieties of sweets. Following this are a variety of rituals, including ritual purification, gifts to the priests, and expenditure. The last is very flexible. In fact, I was told that there are three classes.

The cheapest one is around Rs. Five thousand. The medium is round 10,000 and the top class is the one without limit – it just goes by the capacity of the purse of the successors of the departed ones. Of course, only the males have this privilege. The daughter can spend, but the rituals have to be performed by a son or one who qualifies to be one – a male member of the departed one's family who volunteers to do the rites. The last one ensures a first class air travel to heaven for the deceased. Those opting for the cheapest one may just manage to get an unreserved second class ticket on the express to heaven. I have seen families which have not bothered about the existence of their parents, shedding crocodile tears after the latter's death and performing first class ceremonies to help the departed soul enter its heavenly abode in style.

One has to analyze the reasons for all the rituals that follow death, more particularly when the livings have to get into all sorts of problems of the pecuniary kind to perform the rituals. The first seemed to be demands of the priestly class. The priest is required for every ritual starting from the

shifting of the mortal remains to the cremation ground. Here too, the lighting of the pyre is preceded by the rituals. Then the bones have to be removed along with ashes. This is followed by a period of mourning, variety of rituals culminate in a ritual purification followed by a feast in honour of the departed. It is in this that one gets the opportunity to make a show of one's wealth and prestige by gifting things to the priest who are the conveyors of these things to the diseased. The more affluent sections show off by gifting gold, real cow, costly clothing etc. Those opting for the low priced versions have to be content with gifts of cheaper things, many times only replicas. Then comes pressure from the family and society. In fact, I was asked by cousin 'brother' on the 12th day after my father's demise as to whether I would perform any ceremonies for my father's soul. When I replied in the negative, he told me that the family had been made impure and purification rituals had to be performed. When I told him that was his problem, and not mine, he was quite cut up. I had to tell him that I had not given a paisa to priest and I did not want to start at the age of 56. Then another factor performing these rituals seems to be fear of the dear departed soul coming to haunt the family members. If any untoward incident happens and any astrological advice is sought,

the explanation may come out that the problems are caused by the non-performance of the rites for the departed person's soul's journey to heaven. Do such rituals exist among other religious groups? I cannot recall whether Muslims have them. But among Roman Catholics it seems to exist. I remember one case in which one old man had approached me with a grievance about his daughter's unnatural death, which he suspected to be a murder. One of his anxieties was as how he was to mobilize resources for his daughter's monthly mass which would involve expenditure of at least ten thousand rupees! For those whose religious sentiments may be offended, here is an anecdote from the life of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the Founder of the Arya Samaj. One morning, he was pouring out pots of water from a tank. When asked why, he informed them that he was watering his fields. Everyone laughed at him as all knew that his fields were few miles away! His reply was that if food and water and other offerings presented to Brahmins during ceremonies connected with death were supposed to reach their fathers in heaven who were so far away, why water could not reach his fields which were only a few miles away!

**Prof. Narendra Nayak**  
(From his Book  
*Battle against  
Supernatural*)

## A WORD ABOUT *Battle against Supernatural*

*Battle against Supernatural* is a faithful chronicle of Prof. Narendra Nayak's exploits over three decades. A die-hard rationalist and President of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA), he has actively spearheaded a crusade against superstitions, often at great personal risk. He has debunked many a so-called 'myth', 'miracle' and 'ghost story'. He has also publicly exposed the outrageous claims of 'Miraclemen' and 'Godmen'.

Have you ever been told being possessed with a 'sixth sense' of intuition which you've found difficult to explain? Despite man's extraordinary technological advances, do you still feel something is missing a deeper, more realistic understanding of life? Do you believe in Supernatural power? Black magic and Superstitions are not just outdated belief systems – they are most often

intelligently crafted devices to fool and exploit the gullible masses. This is the social message that Prof. Narendra Nayak forcefully makes in this book.

You may read this book to know more about: • Hoax of Milk Drinking Ganesha • Miracle lamp of Chigali • Satya Saibaba • The Cult of Kalki • Benn Hinn • Mata Amritanandamayi • Sri Sri Ravishankar • Quackery, chicanery and psychic surgery • Cow Urine Therapy, Colour Therapy • Ghosts and Haunted Houses • Astrology and Palmistry • Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) • Faith Healing • Mission against Tantriks and Miraclemen ...and more.

It is sad, says Prof. Nayak, that despite wide-spread education and extraordinary technological advances a majority of people continue to believe in paranormal phenomena. Through the illustration of these examples, he encourages the reader to cultivate a scientific temper and think for oneself before believing the absurd.

**B Premanand**

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